University of Alberta

Inside the Ring: The Ethnic and Racial Composition of the Edmonton Boxing Community.

by

Mark Joseph Keating ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Sociology

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Mark Keating

1A - 10825 86 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T6E 2N1

Date: August 5, 1998

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled: Inside The Ring: The Ethnic and Racial Composition of the Edmonton Boxing Community submitted by Mark Joseph Keating in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Harvey Krahn PhD
Supervisor

William Johnston PhD

Ann M. Hall PhD
External Examiner

Date: June 29, 1998

ABSTRACT

INSIDE THE RING: THE ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMPOSITION OF THE EDMONTON BOXING COMMUNITY

In this thesis, participant observation and in-depth interviewing were used to confirm that ethnic and racial minority groups are found in greater proportion in the Edmonton Boxing Community than in the general population. The data reveals one of the important reasons for minority involvement in the sport is socialization of boxing through their family, where boxing becomes a taken-for-granted social practice early in the individual's life. The findings highlight the association between the minority shared experiences of discrimination and prejudice and the sport of boxing. In addition, young people come to boxing for other reasons, but it is 'respect' (for oneself and from others) gained in the ring, that helps explain why they continue to be involved in boxing.

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.

- Albert Einstein

To begin writing from our pain eventually engenders compassion for our small and groping lives. Out of this broken state there comes a tenderness for the cement below our feet, the dried grass cracking in a terrible wind. We can touch the things around us we once thought ugly and see their special detail, the peeling paint and gray of shadows as they are - simply what they are: not bad, just part of the life around us - and love this life because it is ours and in the moment there is nothing better.

- Natalie Goldberg

My religion is very simple, my religion is kindness.

- Dalai Lama

Mom

For your many sacrifices,

I dedicate this thesis to you.

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Any thesis is a collaborative undertaking. Likewise, this project has not been mine alone. I would like to thank Dr. Harvey Krahn, Dr. Ann Hall, and Dr. William Johnston for their intellectual input as well as their support and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. David Brown, who inspired me to think sociologically.

Thank you mom for help in the way that only you know how to provide. Sandy, Garth and Danielle, thank you for providing a safe and supportive refuge whenever I felt the URGE (fairly often) to escape from writing, while coming to the realization my situation was similar to the boxer in the ring, "you can run, but you can't hide". Thanks Art and Sonja for a relaxing summer and reminding me to take life a little easier.

Since its inception in Lethbridge, academia has been an incredibly personal journey for me. It came along at a time in my life when I seemed to be experiencing a bit more personal difficulty than normal. This thesis reminds me that things worth having come at a price.

I am grateful to the many members of the Edmonton boxing community who not only cooperated in the research but also encouraged me to act like a boxer by 'doing' some boxing. Time and again, boxers expressed their fears (whether consciously or not). Partly, they fear leaving the corner and going into the middle of the ring: alone. They told me what they fear most, even more than getting hurt, is simply looking bad. While I struggled with almost every single word that I put down in this thesis, I came to realize similarities between my fear of writing and the boxer's fear of looking bad. By 'doing' it, the boxer overcomes fear each time he or she steps into the ring. That, I admire. I learned a little bit about how to box by doing it; which kind of sums up writing this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When Muhammad Ali lit the torch to officially open the 1996 Olympic Summer Games in Atlanta, Georgia, the sight stirred emotions in people watching from all over the world. In fact, it has been said that Muhammad Ali was once the most popular or best known person in the world (even more so than the Pope). What was so powerful about that sight?

While Ali's achieved status in the world became possible largely from his accomplishments in the sport of boxing, his physical degeneration was also the result of a lengthy career in a sport in which he suffered too many blows to his brain. Was the sight of him lighting the torch more powerful because he was a Black man symbolizing the greatness associated with being known as the 'The Heavyweight Champion of the World?' And why are so many Blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities involved in boxing? These questions, and many others, led to this exploratory study of the Edmonton Boxing Community. The researcher went into the gym to train like a boxer and to talk to fighters, all in the hope of understanding if minorities are over-represented in the Edmonton Boxing Community and if so, why? The research delves into the boxers' pasts to discover the origins and roots of how they came to know about and enter into the subculture of boxing.

A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Boxing can be viewed sociologically from the perspective of ethnic and 'race'[1] relations.

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1. The term 'race' is contained in single quotations throughout the thesis. This signifies a recognition of the debate over the validity of the term itself. 'Race' is a

One of the concerns of Sociology is how social structures constitute social interaction. Thus, a sociological view of boxing that explores and examines how social roles and norms are manifest in a particular social environment (the social world of boxing) will help explain how social structures in a society and groups within that society, can influence the production and reproduction of a pattern of over-representation of certain groups (minorities) in boxing. If only voluntary agency was responsible, and if the social structures of ethnic and racial 'minorities' were no different from the 'majority', we could expect the same patterns of representation and similar levels of involvement in boxing. Examining the roles and structures of both the sport of boxing, and the relationships between majority and minority groups in Canadian society, should help illustrate the connections between the two.

In order to observe and understand the social roles and structures in the boxing community, and how those influence entry into boxing, this research proposes a social investigation rather than an examination of the psychological motivations or attitudes of boxers.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In Canadian society, as in other societies, there are relations of inequality between groups. Members of groups who have less access to resources are typically referred to as 'minorities' (Fleras and Elliott, 1996). In contrast, the term 'majority' refers to members of

---

socially constructed category. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has clearly stated that 'race' is not a useful scientific way of categorizing people into population groups (Li, 1990).

groups who have more power and resources. The 'majority' members experience a richer quality of life as a result of higher levels of education, better jobs, and higher incomes. For the purpose of this study, an ethnic or racial minority group is not defined by the percentage of a population that they constitute but rather by their limited and unequal opportunities to share in resources[2]. The terms "dominant" and "subordinate" group are synonymous terms also used to describe relationships of unequal access and position with respect to power and opportunities.

Ethnic and racial differences are often the basis around which majority/minority relationships are constructed. In Canada, the majority consists largely of White Canadians. Aboriginal Canadians, Afro-Canadians, certain newly arriving immigrant groups (especially when their skin colour is non-white) are among the groups most likely to be relegated to the 'minority' position. Gender, age, religion, and mental and physical ability are some of the other characteristics of individuals and groups that provide the basis for the construction of patterns of social inequality in Canadian society.

Minority groups can be disadvantaged at both the individual and institutional levels. Individually, prejudicial attitudes can be the source of discrimination, the unequal treatment of members of some groups based on perceived differences, whether physically or socially constructed. Institutionally, members of minority groups may occupy positions nearer the bottom of a stratified and hierarchical arrangement, as a consequence of prejudice and

---

2. For example, in South Africa even since Apartheid ended, to the extent Blacks continue to have a lesser share of power and resources, they remain the 'minority' subordinate group and Whites remain the 'majority' dominant group.

discrimination or as a result of unequal access to education and better jobs. For example, John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* (1969) illustrated that certain ethnic and racial groups were more likely to occupy positions at the lower end of the occupational structure. British descendants tended to occupy the positions at the top of the hierarchy, to have more mobility to reach those positions, and to maintain those positions once achieved. Asians, Blacks, French Canadians, and non-white ethnic and racial immigrant groups newly arriving to Canada tended to be located near the bottom of the hierarchy and were less likely to experience upward occupational mobility. Since Porter published his book in 1968, the negative influence of ethnic and racial origins on educational attainment, class position, and income levels of various ethnic and racial groups have continued to be clearly shown by Canadian sociologists researching the area of race and ethnic relations (Li, 1988; Li, 1990; Li, 1995; Boldt, 1993; Fleras and Elliott, 1996; Ramcharan, 1989; Reitz and Breton, 1994; Henry et. al., 1995).

Porter suggested that, once established, the vertical mosaic took on a life of its own. He thought two factors were mainly responsible for the rigidity of the vertical mosaic. One was blatant discrimination and prejudice by the English and French Charter groups, the other was the retention of cultural practices by certain ethnic groups that were seen as incompatible with success in modern, industrialized societies. Before 1962, immigration laws were based on both ethnic and racial stereotypes and Porter's version of the mosaic was a powerful and insightful analysis taken in the context of that time period (Satzewich, 1998). According to Satzewich, three empirical findings are relevant to the debate about the mosaic in present-day Canada. First, many of the groups identified by Porter in the 1960's as having

a subordinate status to the English and French Charter groups have improved their status in the income and occupational hierarchy of Canada. Second, studies suggest that for members of various racial groups who are born and educated in Canada, there does not seem to be a pattern of inequality based on racial characteristics (Boyd, 1992; Reitz and Breton, 1994). Thirdly, there is evidence of a modified form of the vertical mosaic that applies to non-European immigrants. While many immigrants from Europe have made their way up the occupational and income hierarchies, recent immigrant visible minorities (with higher than average educational levels than the Canadian population as a whole) earn less than European immigrants and visible minorities born in Canada (Boyd, 1992).

The vertical mosaic may be changing from one with both an ethnic and racial basis to a mosaic constructed mainly along more racial lines (Fleras and Elliott, 1996). Research on employers' hiring practices suggests racial discrimination contributes to the existence of the 'racial' mosaic. Henry and Ginsberg's (1985) study found that in face-to-face interviews, as well as telephone inquiries, actors who were members of visible minorities, some of whom had accents, were five times more likely to be told a job position had been filled than were white actors with Anglo accents. A follow up study by Henry (1989) found no racial discrimination in job offers between Blacks and whites in face to face job interviews, but over the telephone, callers with North American accents were still more likely to be favoured for jobs than callers with foreign accents.

The ethnic and racial composition of Canada continues to change and become more of a mosaic. The visible minority population of Canada now represents 9% of adult (over age 15) Canadians (Kelly, 1995). This is double the visible minority population of Canada

in 1981. As of 1991, the 1.9 million visible minority Canadians were comprised of 78% who were immigrants, 15% who were born in Canada, and 7% who were non-permanent residents. Though there is educational diversity among visible minority groups, they are generally more highly educated than average Canadians and yet those aged 25 - 44 are less likely than other Canadians to be employed in professional or managerial occupations (Kelly, 1995).

Aboriginal Canadians are minorities on both ethnic and racial accounts. According to Krahn and Lowe (1998) their unequal position in Canadian society can be partly explained by the historical conditions surrounding the economic development of Canada. After Canada was colonized, and Central Canada began to industrialize, and the West opened up for settlement, traditional Aboriginal economies were largely destroyed. Since Aboriginal people were perceived as impeding economic development, they were placed 'out of the way', on reservations. Aboriginal participation in the labour market has historically been low and as a result unemployment and poverty rates on reserves have also been extremely high. Lack of education partly explains their marginal labour market position, as does racism and discrimination within the school system. Further, a sketchy work background and a lack of job-search resources make entry into the labour market even more difficult for Aboriginal people who leave the reserves in search of employment in urban centres in Canada.

In addition to the occupational sphere, in other large-scale institutions of Canadian society, ethnic and racial groups often hold minority positions. Aboriginal Canadians, for example, do not collectively achieve educational levels equal to the majority White Canadians. The extreme over-representation of Aboriginal Canadians in the Criminal Justice

System is yet another indication of marginalization from mainstream society and evidence of their minority status. The *Final Report* (1988) of the Task Force on Aboriginal People in Federal Corrections, showed that Aboriginal offenders comprised 27.3% of the federal inmate population on the Prairies in 1983, and had risen to 31% by March 1987. The percentage of native offenders doing time in provincial prisons for federal offenses was 17.3% in 1983, and also increased, to 24.6% in March 1987. In every province in Canada, natives make up a far greater proportion of the prison populations than their percentage in the general population. In other areas, like health and politics, minority groups are undervalued and have less power and influence with which to make decisions that would provide them with as rich a quality of life as majority Canadians.

SPORT AS AN ARENA FOR SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Sport is an important institution in the everyday lives of many Canadians. Whether broadly or narrowly defined, sport "is a cultural practice that sustains structured relationships of domination and subordination" (Hall, 1985: 109). And though we may not typically view sport as an area where social inequalities exist, as a microcosm of the larger Canadian society, it likely reflects ethnic and racial relations and inequalities found in other areas of Canadian society, such as those mentioned above. For example, different sporting activities may demonstrate patterns of inequality between ethnic and racial groups that are disadvantaged in the minority sense. An examination of how minority ethnic and racial groups are involved in sport might illustrate the existence of unequal relationships and how, through social interaction, structures of inequality are maintained and reproduced.

If equality of opportunity in sport exists, then a proportionate number of members of different ethnic and racial groups could be expected to be participating and to be equally successful in different types of sport. But some sports may be more expensive to participate in or may be perceived as having higher status than others. If so, minorities may not participate in such areas of sport because social conditions create structures of economic disadvantage. In other words, some areas of sport may be more accessible to majority Canadians than they are to minorities. In contrast, other areas of sport, for various reasons related to race and ethnic relationships in society, may be more open to disadvantaged groups. Of those sports that may be more accessible to minorities, boxing is one possibility and is considered in this study.

THE ETHICS OF BOXING

As a sport, boxing is both problematic and controversial[3]. Labelled the "sweet science," boxing is a tremendously athletic endeavour requiring physical skill, power, and endurance. But boxing also has an inherently violent nature and the appearance of 'intent to

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3. Boxing has a history of corruption. One of the reasons Pugilism flourished in the eighteenth century in England was because it provided a forum for betting. It was more than simply a fight between two men. It was an opportunity to bet on an unpredictable outcome. It is the element of chance in fact that helps define an activity as sport. Pugilism, the antecedent to boxing, was filled with unfair play and interference. Brailsford stated "fair play had to escape from the shades of the betting-room into the full sunshine of athleticism" (1985;128). The idea that fights can be easily fixed and that a boxer can take a dive or throw a fight to guarantee a side wager for themselves, or for others with larger bets on the outcome, illustrates how easily the sport can be corrupted. If a boxer throws a fight - known as taking a dive - it could be very difficult to detect. The possibility a boxer can bet against himself and lose the fight on purpose, provides an incentive to cheat where the rewards can be higher than the risks of getting caught.

injure' raises the question of whether boxing should be defined as sport. Physically, it can be a risky and potentially harmful sport. Some of the medical risks include facial scarring, eye injuries (e.g., dislodged corneas), and most importantly, brain injury. Although the frequency of death in the ring is low, boxing can be, and has been, fatal.

One of the controversies surrounding the sport of boxing is the moral debate over whether there is an 'intent to injure'. The specific nature of boxing, most particularly in the professional ranks, is to render the opponent unconscious. This is the most widely accepted and clearest form of winning aspired to by professional boxers. In amateur boxing where knockouts are not as common as professional boxing, there may therefore be more emphasis on outscoring the opponent; still, all boxers need to be aware of the possibility of being knocked out themselves and thus the knockout is always foremost in the boxer's mind. The rendering of the opponent unconscious is achieved by sublethal blows to the head resulting in concussion. If the premise of 'intent to injure' is accepted, it becomes questionable whether an activity espousing such a philosophy should be labelled 'sport'.

Nevertheless, boxing is considered a sport. Action that takes place inside the ring, as opposed to outside the ring, seems to be maintained and legitimized by the structure and rules of the sport itself. The location or context of the action (inside of the ring) seems one of the critical defining variables in the legitimization of boxing (Jackson, 1993). Action of a similar (though not exact) nature outside of a boxing ring would normally be considered illegal. As a researcher, I am aware of the ethical questions surrounding boxing, but at the same time have chosen to accept this activity as a "sport" and to frame the research questions accordingly.

Boxers, like all athletes, experience a wide range of physical injuries and ailments. The nature of boxing is that the body is used as the weapon of offense at the same time as it is the target of assault. This results in uniquely deleterious physical consequences for the body of the boxer. The following kinds of injuries are common to boxers: fractures of the carpus, metacarpus, thumb, nose and jaws, scratched and detached retinas, black eyes and swollen faces, bruised ribs and kidneys, sore limbs and skin discolouration, twitching nerves in the face, chipped and broken teeth and crushed ears, cuts over and under the eyes, on the eyelids, the forefront, and inside the mouth (Wacquant, 1995).

The inherent dangers of the sport, especially the evidence of an association with brain damage, has been well studied by the medical community (Corsellis et al., 1989; Morrison, 1986). The medical term "dementia pugilistica", commonly referred to in boxing as "punch drunk," results from repeated sublethal blows to the head. While studies do not estimate statistical risks that boxing poses to the brain, and there are debates within the medical literature in this regard, a range of studies using computer tomography and magnetic resonance imaging have been employed. Corsellis et. al (1989) suggest that years would have to pass before the effects of brain damage caused by boxing could be expected to be fully manifested, and the currently available technology in medical science limits the extent that brain damage can be shown to be chronic and long term. The report on amateur boxing prepared for the Government of Ontario by Kidd et al. (1985) includes a bibliography of over one hundred articles. In the articles, the harmful effects of boxing are studied. A majority of the articles focus on head injury and brain damage that may result from boxing. The report suggested two verifiably empirical propositions with respect to injury and

boxing:

> 1. The human brain is extremely vulnerable to the kind of blows delivered in boxing; in this respect, there is no difference between amateur and professional boxing.
> 2. There is evidence of chronic brain damage in some boxers with extensive ring careers. Neither of these propositions can be disputed (Kidd et al.,1985:35).

The majority of the studies reviewed by Kidd et al. examined professional boxers. Nevertheless, the clinical evidence would seem to suggest that, regardless of professional or amateur status, brain damage is closely associated with lengthy participation in boxing. However, while Wacquant (1995) acknowledges that the issue of brain damage is well publicized, and does not refute the evidence on how boxing causes brain damage, he states that the extent and degree of damage is badly estimated. According to Wacquant, the most commonly occurring and chronic injuries suffered by boxers, most likely to cut their careers short, are injuries to their hands: "Some punchers have too much punching power for the physical built of their hands - the kinetic energy packed by a boxer's punch can exceed 100 Joules - and break them repeatedly during fights" (Wacquant, 1995: 84). Finally, it is fitting to give the final comment on brain damage in this thesis to two experienced and outstanding boxers themselves. Boxer Terry Marsh made a remark to the effect that he did not need the British Medical Association to tell him that getting hit on the head could not do him any good, and boxer Barry McGuigan stated, "boxing damages your brain, don't let anybody tell you different" (Corsellis, 1989: 109) .

Professional boxing has been banned in Sweden and Norway, and modifications to amateur rules in those countries have been instituted in an attempt to make the sport safer (Kidd et al, 1983; Morrison, 1986). The modifications have been instituted to help move the

focus of attention away from the boxer's head to a stronger emphasis on out-pointing the opponent by the use of blows to the body. But the tendency to direct blows to the head of the boxer are built in to the structure of the sport of boxing. The quest for the knockout, with punches directed at the boxer's head, is a means to physically weaken the opponent and slow him down, thereby making him more vulnerable.

ETHNIC AND RACIAL MINORITIES IN BOXING IN CANADA

Individuals who take up boxing are willing to risk pain as well as inflict pain, with the possibility of serious harm to themselves and their opponents. Who would be interested or attracted to the sport in Canada and for what reasons? And why, as research from the USA suggests, would disadvantaged groups be over-represented? Given the violent nature and risk of harm in boxing, it seems right to be concerned, and to further ask why. Since disadvantaged groups are over-represented in boxing in the USA, it is likely a similar pattern would be found in Canada.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The next two chapters include a review of relevant literature, a listing of the research questions, and a discussion of the method of research and procedures used in the collection and analysis of the data. The second half of the thesis beginning in Chapter Four presents findings, analysis, conclusions, and suggestions for further research. This thesis is largely qualitative, and thus the data and interpretation tend to be interspersed throughout the chapters. Chapter Four may be the exception; the purpose being largely the reporting of the

ethnic and racial composition of the Edmonton boxing community (information perhaps more amenable to measurement and quantification than any other evidence generated by the study).

Chapter One has provided the background to the study and a rationale for studying the ethnic and racial composition of boxing from a sociological perspective. Chapter Two reviews additional literature and serves as a starting point in the formulation of research questions by locating the topic in the existing knowledge of ethnic and race relations as they relate to the sport of boxing. Chapter Three describes the procedures used in the collection of data. It also recounts the researcher's journey into the gym as he becomes an insider in the sport of boxing. While not necessarily answering specific research questions, this section provides the researcher's subjective reaction to what takes place inside the social world of the boxing gym. The subjective understandings gained through participation in boxing enhanced the in-depth interviews and the other observations made while in the field, thereby adding to the overall credibility of the study.

Chapter Four begins to present the findings. It provides a quantitative account of the ethnic and racial composition of two boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton boxing community in general. A number of boxing events were also attended by the researcher, and the description of the ethnic and racial composition of these events adds to our knowledge of the ethnic and racial groups involved in boxing in Edmonton. Chapter Five contains excerpts from interviews with boxers that begin to address the reasons for the over-representation of minorities in boxing. Family, friends, accidental encounters, and a fighting background are themes that emerged from the data and highlight how the

participants first entered into the subculture of boxing. Included in Chapter Five is an analysis of the concept of respect. The notion of respect as a motivator in the sport of boxing is shown to be related to the reasons for individuals participating in boxing. Chapter Six reviews the findings as they relate to the research questions and discusses discrepancies between the findings of this study and the existing literature. The chapter finishes by stating some of the shortcomings and limitations of the study and recommending some suggestions for future research on the ethnic and racial composition of the sport of boxing.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review serves a number of purposes. The first, more obvious purpose, is to examine past studies and research, both theoretical and empirical, in order to gain a sense of the current state of knowledge related to the topic of boxing and its ethnic and racial organization. Secondly, with an understanding of the current state of knowledge, questions considered in this thesis should highlight areas of research worthy of exploration so as to expand the knowledge base related to ethnic and race relations and boxing.

In the past, ethnic and race relations has been an important area of study in Sociology. Sport, for the most part has been an area of study by experts in Physical Education and Recreation and has only recently become a research area taken up by social scientists. Possibly, due to the obvious involvement of minority groups in boxing, past research, whether from the social sciences or from sport studies, did have some focus on ethnic and race relations in the sport. However, the overlap was not large. Thus, this literature review covers areas where there is a great deal of room for integration and expansion. The topics reviewed are as follows: possible differences between ethnic and race relations in Canada and the United States; minority involvement in boxing; and finally some of the empirical studies of the involvement and success of minorities in boxing and the theoretical perspective that helped to frame the studies.

ETHNIC AND RACE RELATIONS IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

In the previous chapter, I outlined some of the patterns of inequality between ethnic

and racial groups in Canadian society. But sport might be an egalitarian domain where minorities are successful. Or, in contrast, it could be an arena in which they are not achieving equally as well as dominant groups.

Since much of the research on boxing derives from studies done in the USA, pointing out similarities (even if only in general terms) between Canada and the USA with respect to ethnic and racial relations is important. Minorities in both countries share a subordinate status. If minority boxers are found in larger numbers in Canada than are members of the majority group, such as is the case in the USA, it underscores the importance of subordinate status in determining who becomes involved in boxing.

The involvement of ethnic and racial minorities in sport in Canada, and by extension in boxing, takes place within the larger social domain of Canadian society. In this study, the similarities between Canada and the USA in terms of ethnic and race relations are important. The description of Canada as a cultural mosaic contrasted with the melting pot of the United States has led to a perception that Canadians are more tolerant of minorities and less prejudicial and less likely to discriminate against minority groups. But based on social distance indicators and studies of discrimination and prejudicial attitudes in a number of different areas, Reitz and Breton (1994) point out that, regardless of the multi-cultural fact of Canadian society and the pluralistic intonations, differences in dominant/subordinate relations in the two countries may be more illusory than real.

Baer, Grabb, and Johnston (1990) add strength to Reitz and Breton's findings by refuting the thesis put forward by Lipsett (1964), who suggested that due to unique historical circumstances and Canada's historical alignment with British conservatism, Americans and

Canadians have distinct values and beliefs. In their empirical study, Baer, Grabb, and Johnston found only insignificant differences between Canadian and American values and beliefs. They found Lipsett's assertions that Canadians are more conservative and less likely to be in favour of equality and individualism, and less concerned about being controlled by others in power than Americans, to be unsupported due to imprecision in measurement and logical flaws in the arguments. Hence, we are probably justified in examining the USA literature on minorities in sport, and using this information to frame this study on boxing in Canada.

MINORITIES IN SPORT AND BOXING

In the United States, sport appears to offer an area of opportunity for ethnic and racial groups. At least their involvements and achievements seem apparent through accounts in the mass media such as television, newspapers, and magazines. In certain sports, minority groups seem to excel, while in other sports they are barely visible if at all. The National Basketball Association is made up of about 73% Afro-Americans. In professional football, Afro-Americans number around 57% (Sailes, 1991) of all players. In the United States, as well as in Australia, the disproportionately high involvement of minorities in the sport of boxing has been documented (Sails, 1991; Edwards, 1971; Wacquant, 1993). While roughly 12% of the population of the USA are of Afro-American descent, they make up approximately 70% of the boxers at the amateur and professional levels (Sailes, 1991;

Wacquant, 1992). Increasing numbers of Hispanics[1] have been entering the sport, and together with other members of minority groups, account for a substantial portion of the remaining 30% of boxers (Wacquant, 1992).

Not only is the sport of boxing currently over-populated by racial and ethnic minority groups, there is also historical evidence of their involvement in boxing. Weinberg and Arond (1971) recorded a pattern of involvement of minorities in the sport of boxing that parallelled the growth of different immigrant groups into the United States. Jenkins (1988) identified the ethnic identification of professional boxing champions from boxing record books, newspapers, fight programs, and from responses to questionnaires. He then illustrated how the pattern of ethnic and racial representation in boxing ran parallel to the pattern of large scale migration of various immigrant groups to the USA, and the southern to northern migration of Blacks within the USA from 1890 through to 1949.

Although, after the turn of the century, the sport was dominated (at least professionally) by the Irish, Jewish, and Italians respectively, Clement (1954) suggested that by as early as 1890, Blacks were already being recognized as world champions in many divisions of boxing. From around 1950 the sport of boxing has been dominated by Afro-Americans (Weinberg and Arond, 1971). This domination of the sport by Afro-Americans might be partly explained by two things. First, Jenkins (1988) illustrates that the Afro-American population moved into locations that were in closer proximity to the structure of

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1. Over the last four decades, Afro-Americans have been especially dominant in the heavyweight divisions of boxing. Recently, Hispanic boxers have been posing the most serious challenge to Black dominance in the sport. Hispanics have been achieving success especially in the light and middle weight divisions (Sugden, 1987).

the sport of boxing. Secondly, the civil rights movement was starting to remove blocked opportunities for minorities and likely gave Afro-Americans more opportunity to pursue participation in social arenas, one of which was the sport of boxing.

In Australia, as well as in the USA, a similar pattern of involvement in boxing occurs as minority Aborigines are also disproportionately represented in the sport of boxing. Ray Mitchell, an Australian boxing authority, stated that "there are more Aboriginal boxers per head than any other group in the world" (Tatz, 1987:40). While Aborigines constitute roughly 1% of the population, they have accounted for 15% of the Australian boxing champions. But in spite of great success by Aborigines in the sport of boxing, their achievements have not always been recognized. In the past, boxing in Australia has served more as a vehicle of discrimination and exploitation, as Aborigines have been trapped in often vicious racism, unending stereotyping, and a universal exploitation of the typical Black boxer (Tatz, 1987; 40-52).

UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY VIA SPORT

Early evidence that boxing provided a means of social mobility was suggested by Henderson (1968), who discussed the inter-plantation fights that were staged by plantation masters who pitted their slaves against one another. The reward for the successful slave was preferential treatment from the slave master.

In today's society, since minorities are in subordinate positions, and have fewer choices and opportunities to participate in as wide an array of sports as do 'majority' Canadians, minorities may be more vulnerable to accept the risks associated with boxing.

In this case, a subordinate position in the sport of boxing translates into accepting substantial risk of injury when there is in fact a small probability of success - at least in financial terms. Thus, with respect to social mobility, arguments that sport in general, and boxing in particular, provide members of any group with greater opportunities for upward mobility are likely overestimated.

As Eitzen and Harris (1978) suggest, success in sport is largely a myth. As to reaching the professional ranks of sport and earning a living, Eitzen and Harris suggest it is failure, rather than success that is more prevalent in sport and more accurately defines the reality of sport. They note that the number of college players or high school players who will make it to the professional ranks of sport are an extremely small percentage. Then, once there, the careers are short lived; typically average careers for football or basketball are five years and for baseball seven to eight years. But the vast majority of athletes who spend time and energy pursuing careers in sport will fail to reach the professional ranks. A number of processes such as cooling out, shutting out, and degradation are involved in the removal of the athlete away from sport. Eitzen and Harris (1978) suggest that in addition to the disappointment, some of the more serious negative consequences that confront athletes are the challenges of readjustment (particularly for athletes who may have strongly invested their identities in the role of athlete), underemployment, anxiety and serious mental disorder.

Regarding minorities in sport and mobility, the "White man - Black body" mentality is perpetuated by the predominance of the Black athletic identity in American colleges and universities. The emphasis on sport keeps these athletes disengaged academically to a point where they take longer to finish degrees. The end result is an educational experience that

may be of questionable value compared to non-athletic students (Solomon, 1994).

Thus, the likelihood of reaching the pinnacle of success in any sport, professional or otherwise, is very small. The same is true in boxing. Edwards (1971) suggests that the success of a few Black athletes reinforces the "success" mythology for many Black kids on the streets. This mythology of success in sport is likely to be more alluring to the lower socioeconomic classes, including ethnic and racial groups. The scarcity of Black heroes in other walks of life contributes to an increased status of popular Black athletes. The athleticizing of Black identity encourages a disdain for academic achievement, already widespread among many Black males (Hoberman, 1997). But for the overwhelming number of members of minority groups who dream about and aspire towards achieving success through sport, the energy and commitment expended is unlikely to provide meaningful long term benefits in financial or occupational terms. While similar results hold true for individuals pursuing other professional sporting careers, only in boxing is the risk of brain damage so expressly manifest.

EXPLANATIONS FOR MINORITIES IN SPORT

One reason for minority involvement in boxing could be to maintain a sense of ethnic or racial identity. Tatz (1987; 52) states that boxing has offered a source of collective pride for Aborigines, and is a venue where the oppressed can vanquish the oppressor. Related to ethnic or racial identity are myths suggesting minorities have advantages in sport resulting from racial differences (Wiggins,1988; Sailes,1991). These myths may play a part in the involvement of minorities in boxing. These myths have tended to persist in the face of

contrary evidence, and can thereby provide a stimulus for some minorities, and others, to legitimate the success of racial minorities in boxing, thereby tending to dismiss social and economic factors.

Past involvement and success in the sport of boxing by other members of their group might lead to the reproduction of values and beliefs, perhaps unconsciously, that innate physical characteristics of their group provide them with an advantage in boxing. The nature/nurture debate continues to plague the issue of superior performances of some racial groups, especially Blacks. The continued attention given to this area of research in the sociology of sport illustrates the complexity of the debate. However, the reasons why people believe, or wish to believe, that physical racial differences can explain the athletically superior performances of some racial groups may be more related to personal attitudes and political agendas than to the pursuit of academic truths. Thus, by complying to myths (eg., myths related to racial characteristics and sport) people may unknowingly perpetuate the damaging social conditions in which they live.

In the *Journal of Sport History,* David K. Wiggins (1989) comprehensively traces the debates over Black athletic superiority as he charts many of the past empirical studies and theories that have been espoused by individuals who have sought to explain Black dominance in sport. He details early studies, such as that by the famous physical educator Eleanor Metheny (1939), and the host of studies that followed her work, many of which focused on the biological and the physiological side of the debate. He summarizes Eitzen and Sage's (1978) study, concluding that the most likely reasons for Black dominance in sport are twofold. First, occupational discrimination in so many other areas leave sport as

one of few avenues left available. Second, the sports opportunity social structure within American society is such that some areas like basketball are easily affordable and accessible while other areas offer fewer opportunities; for example golf or tennis. Wiggins (1989) states that the dominance of Blacks in sport and the differences in involvement between Blacks and Whites in sport are most likely:

> primarily a consequence of different historical experiences that individuals and their particular racial group underwent. While elite championship athletes are blessed with a certain genetic makeup that contributes to their success in sport these inherited attributes transcend any racial grouping (Wiggins, 1989;158).

In the USA, explanations based on socioeconomic, cultural, class, and social characteristics have been posited to explain the over-representation of minorities in the sport of boxing. Studies by Weinberg and Arond (1971) and Wacquant (1993) provide empirical evidence confirming those explanations. Wacquant's[2] (1991) explanation involves socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors that provide the necessary conditions for recruitment to the sport and results in the predisposition of Afro-Americans toward the sport. Jenkins (1989) suggested that whether an ethnic group produced professional boxers depended more on whether the group settled in central-city low-income urban neighborhoods than on where they immigrated to the USA from or whether they displayed what he termed the 'hungry fighter' socioeconomic status.

Sugden's (1987) study on minorities in boxing supports many of the findings and

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2. Wacquant's study is an ethnographic portrait of the experiences in the subculture of boxing. Wacquant became a participant observer in an inner city boxing club in Chicago. He spent over two years training, sparring, and boxing at the club and amateur levels in order to gain a better understanding of the social logic of boxing.

conclusions drawn by Wacquant. Sugden suggests that the Memorial Boxing Club's location in close proximity to where disadvantaged members of minority ethnic and racial groups live provides a perceived window of opportunity for the neighbourhood youths. Values such as 'toughness', which are emphasized in the social environment are the values necessary for individuals who take up the sport of boxing. The lessons learned in the boxing gyms serve to reinforce similar values that are emphasized and regarded as important outside of the boxing clubs in the neighbourhood environment. But very few of the individuals who take up boxing actually achieve success financially or in other respects. Thus, according to Sugden, boxing clubs serve to further exploit the disadvantaged.

Taking a somewhat different approach, Canadian sport sociologist Kevin Young (1991) has employed victimological studies in order to conceptualize athletes as workers in hazardous occupations. The structure and organization of sport, viewed through employer/employee relationships, can be used to examine how athletes comply with the values of sport, particularly in the acceptance of values related to risk of injury.

Young (1991) also uses a cultural studies approach to explain the acceptance of risks of injury in sport. Cultural hegemony, or an ideology of everyday beliefs, becomes taken for granted, as athletes are socialized to become uncritical of dominant sporting values. Contributing to this hegemony is the socialization of athletes to accept injury through the normalization of pain and injury as a positive sporting value (Nixon, 1993; Curry and Strauss,1993). Hughes and Coakley's (1991) study lends support by theorizing the over-conformity to deviant values as a further explanation for the victimization of athletes in the sport. Values in sport are closely tied to winning and tendencies to legitimate violence

and aggression are modelled by peers, coaches, and other influential agents within the sport subculture.

The over-emphasis on competition and winning (win at all costs) are associated with attitudes and beliefs that are consistent with more aggressive behaviours in sport. These values have been correlated with the construction of a masculine identity. Actions of an aggressive and violent type are considered positive forms of deviance in sport and the acceptance of risks associated with violent sport are promoted as masculine characteristics (Young, 1993; Young, Mcteer, White, 1994).

This thesis draws on many of these general explanations to answer the question of why young male members of minority racial groups in a Canadian city might be attracted to boxing. Thus, the following discussion sharpens the focus by identifying five specific possible explanations why Aboriginal or Black youth might be over-represented in boxing clubs in Edmonton.

ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

First, given the economic disadvantage of minorities, boxing clubs located in closer proximity to where minority groups are likely to reside might present boxing as a sport more accessible and affordable than other sports. If ethnic or racial minority groups, who are economically disadvantaged, live in areas in closer proximity to boxing gyms, then male youths from these groups could more likely be over-represented. Exposure to boxing clubs could be one stage leading to participation in the sport. Individuals who know of the location of a boxing club and have easy access could be more likely to venture into the club. The

formal age at which youth are allowed to participate in amateur boxing in Canada is 11 years old. For some minority youths, walking to a sport club or facility may be necessary due to a lack of financial resources. Thus, proximity to a boxing club could be an important determinant of who participates in the sport. So, youths wanting to be involved in sport could choose boxing because of its convenience, and thus the ease of access could increase the likelihood of over-representation of minority youths.

The commodification and commercialization of sport has made many sporting activities expensive. Boxing is likely cheaper to participate in than many sports. The cost to participate in boxing is likely less than the cost of a golf club membership or registration in organized hockey. So if the cost of boxing is cheaper than other sports, then for economically disadvantaged minorities, cost could be another determining factor in their participation. Or minority youths might choose boxing because it is one of a more limited number of activities to choose from, in contrast to middle and upper class youths.

Alternatively, boxing clubs located in the inner cities, a further distance from middle and upper class areas, present less exposure and thus likely attract fewer middle and upper class youth. Sporting facilities such as hockey rinks and golf courses are found in greater numbers in middle and upper class areas of the city, providing youth from these areas with options other than boxing clubs. So, access and affordability for minority members geographically close to boxing gyms could account for minority over-representation in the sport.

A WAY OUT OF DISADVANTAGE

An alternative explanation is that minorities may be seeking a way out of their disadvantaged circumstances. With fewer employment and career opportunities to choose from, they may perceive boxing as one of a limited number of opportunities in which to improve their subordinate position. While youth members of the majority group may aspire to corporate success, youth members of minority racial and ethnic groups (e.g., young Blacks) might, because of role models, identify with success in the ring and accept the risks and potential harms associated with boxing.

Sport provides many role models for minority youths to emulate. The media reflect the reality that minorities (e.g., Afro-Americans in the USA) are highly successful in the industry of professional sport (and entertainment). "Rags to riches" stories of the lives of boxers like Afro-Americans Mike Tyson[3] and Sugar Ray Leonard, are represented through the media as exemplifying the 'American Dream' and leave the impression that the dream is possible even for minorities. The success of Tyson and Leonard, and others who achieve rare stardom in boxing, helps reinforce and legitimize it as a worthy path to pursue. So, minority youths may be engaged in boxing because they perceive it as more of an opportunity than would members of the White majority for whom other options, involving less risk than boxing, are more plentiful.

Further, if ethnic and racial groups other than the majority group of White Canadians

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3. Mike Tyson, a heavy weight champion, grew up in an orphanage. His story exemplifies the 'American Dream' of a poor Afro-American who became rich and famous through the sport of boxing (Wacquant,1992).

are found in larger numbers in boxing gyms, then for members of those groups, attending boxing clubs could be a means of maintaining an ethnic and racial identity. Part of maintaining this ethnic and racial identity could be the understanding and empathizing of the experiences of others who have experienced similar discrimination. The structure of the sport of boxing may not so much exploit members of minority groups, but their commitment to boxing (and sports where they are over-represented) could be due to a desire to be in a group in which they feel a sense of belonging.

EXPLOITATION OF DISADVANTAGE

Exploitation could also be a possible explanation for the over-representation of minorities in boxing. Having fewer means of employment than members of the majority group, minorities may be exploited by trainers, coaches, or promoters, who recognize their limited career options and then knowingly, or possibly even unknowingly, take advantage of their positions by encouraging and recruiting them into boxing. Alternatively, in Canada, minority ethnic and racial groups like Aboriginal Canadians and Afro-Canadians, may be more easily exploited in the business of boxing. These minority groups may be perceived by promoters, managers, or business people in the boxing world as being more willing, because of their economic disadvantage, to engage in as risky a sport as boxing. They too may be more actively recruited[4] into boxing than members of the majority group. Coaches

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4. Perhaps some coaches and trainers, believing in stereotypes of innate Black athletic superiority, might recruit and then pay more attention to these youths if and when they enter their clubs.

and trainers in the clubs have tremendous influence over minorities, especially youth members, and through their encouragement and expectations could give minority youths the impression that their chances of success in a boxing career are more realistic than the reality may be.

NEIGHBOURHOOD OF VIOLENCE

Disadvantaged areas such as ghettos in some of the large American cities like New York, Detroit, and Chicago, have higher unemployment rates, higher incidence of crime, and more extreme social problems than do middle and upper class neighbourhoods. A sense of anomie is likely more prevalent in these environments as there are fewer means to attain the expected goals valued by society. Individuals possessing the requisite characteristics for success in boxing, such as toughness, are more likely to be found amidst such an environment, where the incidence of crime and violence are the highest. Perhaps the normlessness and sense of anomie exposes youth to values that are well suited for success in the ring. Since these areas of disadvantage are inhabited by predominantly ethnic and racial minority groups, Afro-Americans comprising the largest group, then members of these groups could be expected to be found in boxing in larger numbers than any other groups.

SOCIAL CONTROL MECHANISM

Some youth who are from disadvantaged areas or who have been experiencing problems in their families or at school may be perceived by others as in need of the type of discipline that boxing is believed to provide. Although the studies are not conclusive, there

is empirical evidence supporting the negative relationship between sport participation and juvenile delinquency (as sport participation increases, delinquency deceases). In Segrave and Hastad's (1982) study of 1935 high school students, the results indicated there was significantly less delinquent behaviour among athletes than non-athletes. An interesting finding from this study, if boxing is considered as one of the major sports, was that among athletes, those in the major sports exhibited more delinquent behaviour than those in the minor sports. Segrave's (1978) study of 179 male university and high school students also found support for a negative association between athletic participation and delinquency. Segraves found the relationship between athletic involvement and delinquency to be a function of the degree of athletic involvement, the type of offense, and the social class of the subjects. Another study by Hastad et al., (1984) found that among 381 sixth grade students, of which 278 were classified as sport participants, there was general support for a negative association between participation and delinquency.

In Segrave, Moreau, and Hastad's (1985) study comparing delinquency between athletes participating in ice hockey and non-athletes, no significant differences in total delinquency (the type of delinquent offenses classified were drugs, theft, physical violence and vandalism) were found between hockey players and non-athletes. An interesting finding, (again relevant to boxing, as it is a more physically aggressive sport), was that when categorized by type of offense, ice hockey players reported more delinquency of a physically violent nature than non-athletes. In contrast to these findings, further studies by Segrave and Hastad (1984) using 1693 high school students, of which 788 were athletes, found that similar patterns persisted in the etiology of delinquent behaviour among male and female

athletes and non-athletes.

Minority youth who might be having difficulties at school, getting into fights, and experiencing other personal troubles might be seen as in need of discipline that the structure of boxing provides. Participation in a boxing club might be expected to provide a safe and supportive place where they can channel their frustrations and energies. Police associations in inner cities have been known to direct youth who are in trouble with the law, or who are thought to be in need of direction in their lives, to boxing gyms to help prevent them from getting into further trouble with the law and possibly help them get their lives on a better course. So youth from poorer disadvantaged neighbourhoods might be more likely to end up in a boxing gym than would upper or middle class youths who may not be perceived as having the need for the type of discipline associated with boxing.

Also, socially and morally, the values supporting the activity of boxing itself may be less consistent with the values of middle and upper class parents. They might consider boxing as a reprehensible method of disciplining youth and might be more likely to find the activity in general unacceptable. Thus, middle and upper class youths who have a similar need for guidance and discipline (to help prevent them from getting into fights or just in general, staying out of trouble) might be provided with psychological counselling and other alternatives which might be less available to minorities.

Related to a notion of a subculture more suitable to a violent sport like boxing is the idea that members of disadvantaged groups who are frustrated or angry with their social positions might react to their situation in a physical way. An argument could be made that boxing offers a legitimate channel for physical aggression. It could be the case, even though

individuals may be unaware of their subordinate status, that their aggressive physical expressions in boxing are indirectly the consequence of their subordinate status. For members of these groups, boxing might offer both a chance to be involved in sport, and thereby the means to achieve specific goals, and at the same time a chance to release frustrations or aggressions indirectly related to their subordinate position. Thus, minority youths might self-select themselves into boxing because of the psychological release it offers.

A number of possible explanations for the reasons why minority groups might be over-represented in boxing have been posited. However, the academic research on minorities and boxing derives largely from studies done in the USA. Similar studies of boxing in Canada are scarce if non-existent. Consequently, the study described in this thesis can make an important contribution to the research literature.

In Canada and the USA, differences exist between the historical experiences of ethnic and racial minority groups. There are perceptions that Canada and the USA differ in the nature of discrimination and the level of tolerance that majority members have towards minorities (Reitz and Breton, 1994). With respect to both individual and institutional structures of inter-group relationships, access to opportunities and resources may be more available for minorities in Canada than in the USA.

Although the City of Edmonton does not have the level of organized boxing that economies of scale (larger populations) provide larger American cities, Edmonton has a rich history and tradition in boxing. Thus a strong rationale exists for the proposed study of boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton, which would be partly representative of the larger

Canadian Boxing scene.

This thesis therefore addresses two questions. First, are ethnic and racial minority groups over-represented in the Edmonton boxing community? Secondly, if the over-representation is confirmed, what are some of the reasons and how does an individual become involved in boxing? This study seeks answers to the preceding questions via participant-observation and in-depth interviewing inside the Edmonton boxing community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The assumption that ethnic and racial minority groups will be over-represented in the Edmonton boxing community leads to a number of research questions about the characteristics of boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton, the ethnic and racial composition of members of the boxing clubs, and the motivations and experiences of boxers in the Edmonton boxing community.

During in-depth interviews and casual conversations with members of the boxing community, many additional issues and topics not specifically addressed in the research questions were also pursued. Some of the specific questions used in the interview guide are provided in Appendix A.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BOXING CLUBS

What is the geographical location of the boxing clubs within the City of Edmonton? Are clubs located in commercial or residential areas? Are the locations indicative of what

Sugden (1987) termed subterranean[5] locations? What is the general ambience of the boxing gym?

Who are the members? What type of boxer does the club cater to: juniors, amateurs, professionals, or a combination of different boxers? Do the clubs welcome and cater to any type of boxer, or are they more likely to attract boxers who are highly competitive and who show interest and potential to continue to progress up the amateur or professional ranks of the sport? Are there champions, former champions, belt holders, or ranked boxers of boxing organizations such as the IBF, WBF, WBC, or WBO[6], currently boxing out of the clubs?

What areas of the city do the boxers live in? Do they live in rich or poor areas? Are they from the tough neighbourhoods? What are the ages of the members? Are they students, or are they working? What levels of education do they have? What kind of family structures are they from?

ETHNIC AND RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BOXERS

The members of the boxing community that are of interest are the boxers, trainers, coaches, managers, club owners, and any other persons directly involved in the operation of

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5. In Sugden's (1987) study of the Memorial Boxing Club, he referred to boxing gyms in hidden, secretive, out of the way locations. In similar studies by Wacquant (1991), and Weinberg and Arond (1971), the locations of gyms were frequently physically as well as socially removed from the public view. In Sugden's study, the Memorial Boxing Club was in the basement of a community facility, a place reflective of the term 'subterranean.'

6. The International Boxing Federation, World Boxing Federation, and the World Boxing Organization are some of the various organizations of professional boxing in which boxers can move up through the ranks.

the clubs. Of interest is their ethnic and racial identity and the different groups represented in the different clubs. The research asks which groups are represented and how many members of the groups are represented?

The term 'ethnic' can encompass shared culture and heritage, language, religion and institutions, as well as adherence to a set of beliefs or values of a group (Abercrombie et al, 1984: 90; Henry et. al, 1995: 327). Henry et al. (1995:328) define 'race' as a category of people based on physical characteristics such as skin colour, hair texture, stature, and facial features. The somewhat arbitrary division of people based on real or assumed physical traits has resulted in from between two and 160 possible categories, the existence of which lack empirical validity and scientific merit (Fleras & Elliott, 1992). Thus, the category 'race' has been criticized for reinforcing unequal relations between groups.

To avoid knowingly contributing to the social construction of the category of 'race', the intention of the research is to inquire how the subjects themselves might identify with any particular ethnic or racial category. As Childers and Hentzi (1995:25) suggest, if 'race' is erased, or if considered a subset of a larger category such as ethnicity, the situations and conditions of a group whose members may label themselves belonging to a particular 'race' would be concealed. So, to gain some sense of the conditions within the subculture of boxing, the research inquires into the boxers' perceptions of their own ethnic or racial identity.

The possibilities of a number of ethnic and racial categories exist. For example, members may identify themselves as Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Mexicans, Aboriginal Canadians, or Asians. For some, a cultural or ethnic identity may be preferred to a racial

identity. Some members may perceive themselves as Irish. Also of interest is the members' country of origin. Have they recently immigrated to Canada? Are they from the City of Edmonton, another province, a large city, a small town, or perhaps a rural area? If Aboriginal Canadian, are they from the city or from a reserve?

MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF BOXERS

Little has been studied about how the social experiences of boxers influence their entrance into the sport of boxing. Their stories and subjective experiences may help illuminate how their social background and family upbringing may have contributed to their involvement in boxing. The research questions in this area delve into issues such as why boxers begin boxing in the first place, how they actually arrived at the boxing gym the first time, what they enjoy about the sport, their future expectations in the sport, and some of the lessons they think they may have learned from boxing.

A critical juncture in a boxing career would be the entrance into the sport. Where did their motivation to become a boxer originate? Was their first visit to a boxing club with their father, another family member, or a friend? Did they know people in the sport before they took it up? At what age did they start boxing? The Canadian Amateur Boxing Association regulates that youths do not start boxing until the age of eleven. Is it unusual to start a boxing career later in life? What would be the average age at which youths start boxing in Edmonton? Sugden (1987) stated that, although the legal age for boxing in the United States is twelve, the rule was not always monitored closely. The unwritten rule tends to be if kids are interested and show promise, they are likely not prevented from taking up the sport.

What are boxers' attitudes towards other ethnic and racial groups in boxing? To what do they attribute the success of certain groups, for example Blacks, in boxing? Do they find it unusual or at all different boxing against someone of another racial or ethnic group? Do boxers believe or think some ethnic or racial groups have 'natural' abilities? If so, why do they think so, and on what would they base their conclusions? Do they believe themselves to have natural abilities that benefit them in boxing?

These and other related questions are addressed in Chapters Four and Five. But before moving ahead to the results, Chapter Three will outline the research methods used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Insufficient research has been undertaken examining boxing in Canada. But research in the USA and Australia would lead us to expect a similar pattern of over-representation of minorities in the Canadian boxing scene. To illustrate the existence of such a pattern requires, in part, a method conducive to the quantification of the ethnic and racial composition of the sport. Second, given evidence that over-representation exists, a qualitative approach could then prove useful in understanding where boxers come from and how and why they became boxers.

By going to the gym, training like a boxer, attending boxing matches and interacting with boxers and coaches, I was better situated as a researcher to understand the meanings and interpretations of social things and events in the world of boxing. Unlike a quantitative analysis that uses numerical representation of observations in order to describe and explain phenomenon, a qualitative observational approach is better suited for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relations that take place in the social world of boxing (Babbie, 1992; G6). One of the benefits gained from such participant research is that your "senses gather information directly and you feel it" (Rhodes, 1995; p.60), increasing the awareness, as Goffman would suggest, of the normalcy of a unique social world such as the boxers':

> as do prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients - develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal, you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject (Goffman, 1961; ix-x).

This chapter contains a discussion of the method of data collection and the techniques used in the analysis of the data. The nature of the data, as well as the method employed in its collection, bear directly upon the analysis. The first stage, data collection, included participant observation and in-depth interviewing that took four months to complete. It is common and often necessary in qualitative research for the data collection stage to continue into the data analysis stage; a process of going back and forth between analysing data and returning to the field to collect new data and to verify already collected data (Lofland, 1971; Shaffir et al., 1994). Also included in this chapter is an account of my subjective experiences while taking part in the everyday world inside the boxing gym.

ENTERING THE FIELD

My first recognition that research into the Edmonton boxing community was possible came in December of 1996. Following a telephone conversation with a coach at a local Edmonton boxing club, I was invited to the club to observe. Presenting myself as an open researcher and keeping the more salient ethical[1] considerations in mind, I accepted the invitation and visited the Sundown Boxing Club for the first time. This first visit proved fruitful in a number of ways. After informal conversations with some of the boxers, many of my anxieties related to entering a boxing club were relieved. People were friendly and enthusiastic. When I mentioned my interest in doing research, they seemed interested and

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1. A thorough discussion of the ethical considerations and measures taken to ensure no harm was caused the subjects can be found in Appendix D - Ethics Approval Request To Do Research.

cooperative. They may have been interested in participating for several reasons. For one, they may have been interested in talking to me because I presented myself as unknowledgable about boxing (which I was) but also because I was eager to listen and learn from them. As Shaffir et. al (1994) point out, entering the field and cultivating good relationships depends greatly on the researcher's personal attributes and self-presentation and on other's judgements about him or her as a human being. Shaffir et al. (1994) conclude that researchers willing to respect those being studied, and willing to consider their views and claims, will most often find others willing to show them the ropes. Relatedly, many of the people I met in the clubs expressed their perception that the general public negatively stereotypes boxers and boxing. So, they may have seen me as a non-judgmental listener who, through their experiences, could be enlightened as to the real truth about boxing.

After that first visit, I left thinking that access could be gained in that particular club and that access to other clubs seemed feasible. Following approval from the Research Ethics Committee in the Sociology Department at the University of Alberta, I returned to the Sundown Boxing Club and officially began field work near the end of April in 1997. Over the next four months, I closely monitored attendance at two clubs in the Edmonton boxing community: the Sundown Boxing Club and the Horizon Boxing Club. These clubs then became the locus of the study; in sum, the location for close-up observations of social interaction and for the selection of respondents for in-depth interviews. I thought that one of these clubs would also serve as a suitable site for participant observation as well. With respect to other boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton, I was able to ascertain, from a couple of visits and from talking to coaches, trainers, and managers of these clubs, the approximate

ethnic and racial composition of their membership.

EARLY STAGES IN THE FIELD

A strategy for building rapport with members of the boxing community led to a pattern of interaction in first encounters. I listened while attempting to give the impression they were not being judged in any way, hopefully allowing them to express themselves as freely as possible. Consistent with a qualitative approach, I strived for the unfolding of events in as 'naturalistic' a manner as possible. At the same time, a rather deliberate strategy on my part developed into a pattern in first encounters. In this way a number of goals were achieved: informing the subjects of the research and impressing upon them that they could make a contribution and that they would be listened to.

In first meetings, subjects were informed of the nature of my research and given a broad sense of the general topics and questions of interest. I communicated to subjects the more important ethical considerations such as confidentiality and anonymity, and that they were under no obligation to participate. Most subjects responded positively, suggesting they were in fact interested in the research. This was usually followed by a brief discussion about why they started boxing.

Throughout the field work, a conscious awareness of the technique of "snowball" sampling assisted me in getting to know members of the boxing community. On meeting someone at a boxing gym for the first time it was helpful to mention that their name had come up in conversation at another club. Quite often a key informant would suggest the name of a boxer, coach, or trainer from their club or another club, who they felt would be a

prospective source of information and a potentially good interviewee. At the Sundown Boxing Club, the manager introduced me to a boxer and immediately suggested that we do an interview. The individual consented on the spot and the interview was done later that same day.

One of the advantages in presenting oneself as an overt researcher is that a lack of deception helps to create in those being observed an expectation that the researcher will move around, observe, ask questions with a wide range of curiosity, and then withdraw to take notes (Lofland, 1971). In most boxing clubs, seats are located on the perimeter of the action around the outside walls. These are intended for watching the action and would likely be regarded, in the unlikely event (I never witnessed anyone else taking notes) someone was to take notes in a boxing gym, as the correct place to do it.

Compiling field notes did not pose any serious problems inside the boxing clubs. It did not seem a distraction to the boxers and coaches who were usually absorbed in their routines and circuits. Furthermore, it was not necessary to stare incessantly at social interaction in order to record it. Following a conversation with a participant, important field notes could usually be jotted down fairly easily by taking a seat. While in the field, the social interaction and observation of events would often trigger the memory of past events that were not recorded, but then would become worthy of consideration and recording.

The field notes consist of two types: 1) notes taken during a conversation or while observing, and 2) notes written after I left the field. The first type of notes contain as much as I could possibly record of the conversation and event that was taking place. Occasionally, they contain verbatim communications that I thought were important enough to merit saving,

possibly for quoting in the thesis. Field notes written later, derived from memory and recollection of the day's events, exclude attempts to recall exactly what was said. Here, my aim was to recall as clear as possible the spirit and intent of what took place. Thus, these notes contain no quotations. The recall process was assisted by jotting down small key notes either in the field or shortly after leaving the field (e.g., in my car, immediately after leaving a club). So, the minor hindrances to collecting field notes were similar to what could be expected in taking notes in most public settings. In general, taking notes in the social setting of boxing clubs was manageable.

Although I began interviewing a couple of weeks after my first official visit to the Sundown Boxing Club, in my first month of field work as a researcher I engaged in conversations with anyone who would engage me. I asked questions and observed, asked more questions, took notes, and importantly, listened closely.

LATER IN THE FIELD

Participant observation had been intended from the beginning of the project so when the opportune time presented itself to become more of an insider than an objective researcher looking at boxing from the outside, I initiated this segment of the research. Following repeated suggestions from key informants and boxers themselves that I would enjoy boxing, an opportune time presented itself to initiate the participant-observer segment of the research. Since I had been hanging around the gym, studying the action, and presenting myself mostly in an academic light, when I began participating, my status and acceptance were somewhat heightened. Others in the gym stopped seeing me only as a researcher and began viewing

eventually come to view me. If those new to the sport, with an untrained eye, could perceive me as a boxer, then was it not also probable that I could become more of a boxer in the eyes of those who initially viewed me as a researcher only?

As I slowly became more and more a part of this new community, would the distinction between researcher and boxer (the participant part of the participant-observer) become blurry? After being in the field for only a month I started to be questioned about whether my report was finished. Over the course of the next few months, this line of questioning was posed more frequently and it became evident there was a question of how fully participants understood the extent of the research. Even when a researcher takes precautions to ensure the subjects are well informed and protected from harm, much of the research carries on in a covert form. The subjects can easily forget about the research and simply no longer notice they are being studied. While I was attempting to understand as much as possible about the social world of the boxer, most (some were more interested than others) participants showed little interest in the world of the researcher. In discussion about their lives and experiences in boxing they seemed to engage me, not only because they were cooperating with me in the role of a researcher. In fact, I think they believed I was sincerely interested and concerned about their lives and willing to listen. And so they would occasionally ask me what I was getting out of boxing. They seemed more interested in what I might gain personally from boxing than how I would benefit from research in boxing. It was as if they were seeing me using the research into boxing as a means to an ends; that being becoming a boxer, and like they had done, eventually taking my place in that world.

I worked out for four months during which time I continued the interviewing and

participant observation. In my workouts, I adhered to a regimented training routine in the gym, though I sparred only occasionally and with modest intensity. In addition to four months spent in the field, I attended three amateur boxing cards and two professional fight cards. On each occasion I knew some of the principal actors (fighters) on the fight cards. On a couple of occasions, I was able to talk to a boxer either prior to or immediately after the bout. These encounters provided interesting insights into the emotional high and lows leading up to and following a boxing match. To provide more consistency and support for my understanding of the events as they described them to me in the heat of the moment, later on back in the gym after having had time to reflect, I was able to talk to them again about their experiences at the fight.

I would liked to have participated in an exhibition amateur match to measure the skills that resulted from my training in the boxing gym. To the extent that my own experiences in boxing could have added credibility to the research, at least two things limited my initiative (not my enthusiasm) to training and leaning how to box. First, in spite of headgear and mouth guards, the extensive dental work in my mouth (which includes three bridges) was simply not worth risking. Even in the most modest sparring sessions, it became clear that my dental work would not withstand the punches that I would have to expect to receive in more intensive sparring; and especially in an actual boxing match. Secondly, I had to remove my contact lenses while sparring or risk having them either knocked out of my eyes, or worse, lodged somewhere deeper inside of my eye sockets causing damage. Given the split second timing required to hit a moving boxer, or to defend oneself from such punches, it quickly became apparent my poor eyesight was a handicap putting me further at

risk of injury.

Becoming an insider helped me in selecting which two clubs to study and in the selection of the sample for interviewing. Plus, time spent in the clubs in face-to-face interaction helped me build rapport and trust with members of the community and increased the likelihood of enhancing the richness of the interviews.

INTERVIEWING

Interviews were given obligingly by the participants. On a number of occasions before interviews were requested, subjects made comments to the effect that they would be glad to help out in any way they could. I took these comments as invitations to request an interview. No one approached in the course of my field work refused to cooperate, or responded angrily that I was imposing on them. Some were simply less interested than others. Had anyone been annoyed by my intrusions, I would have simply thanked them and moved on. Every individual I approached in the field was helpful in one way or another and could be considered as having participated in this study. Remarkably, every individual from whom an interview was requested consented to oblige me, although two interviews originally consented to were eventually cancelled. One person postponed a number of times and the other indicated that he was too busy. I offered both subjects a way out by reminding them it was not my intention to impose on their time, and that they were under no obligation whatsoever to participate.

With the exception of two interviews, conversations in the field took place with prospective candidates before the interviews were conducted. In those two specific cases

where the interviews occurred the same day, the subjects clearly expressed their desire and enthusiasm to take part in an interview immediately. For the other cases, the nature of the study was explained, as was their participation and what they could expect in the interview and the interviews scheduled for a later time. The more time I spent in the field, the more I continued to build rapport with participants before interviewing them. This added important qualities to the interviews. A degree of trust developed between myself and the interviewees which increased their willingness to share personal experiences about boxing in the actual interviews. As I came to know more and more about an individual's experiences in boxing through conversations in the field, I was then better able to inquire into pertinent topics and cover areas more in-depth in the actual interviews. For example, while socializing in the gym with Axel, he mentioned that his friend Carlos, a professional boxer, had introduced him to the sport. In the interview with Axel, I was then able to quickly go into this topic by asking him the role Carlos played in his actually getting to the boxing club for the very first time. So, as my knowledge of boxers who were potential candidates for interviewing increased, my understanding of the various issues and topics for exploring in the interviews also expanded.

In total, 17 in-depth semi-structured open-ended interviews lasting between 45 minutes and two hours were tape-recorded. It was my experience that tape-recording, recognized as standard procedure in contrast to simply taking notes in interviews, was necessary. In addition to preserving the richness of the interviews, the saving and storage of the huge volume of data that was collected could not have been possible through simple note taking. Further, as echoed by William Foote Whyte:

> Physical movements, gestures, facial expressions give clues not to be found in the words themselves, and some of these fleeting non-verbal cues will be missed while the interviewer is writing (1982; 118).

INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Interviews were conducted with members from the two boxing clubs in the study. The interviews were representative of the ethnic and racial diversity in the clubs. Five interviews were conducted with persons of Aboriginal or Native descent. Of the remaining twelve interviews, six were 'white' and born in Canada. The remaining six included Afro-Canadian as well as three individuals who recently immigrated to Canada, one belonging to a group that could be considered a 'visible' racial group, the other two, because of their ethnic identification (e.g., language, religion, etc.) could be considered belonging to a group described as a 'non-visible' ethnic group.

More interviews were conducted with boxers from the Sundown Boxing club of which I was an active participant observer, than the Horizon club. This was due in part to the fact I got to know and became more familiar with members from the club in which I was working out. Not to offset the over-sampling, is the fact that two of the interviewees from the over-sampled Sundown Boxing club had spent the greater portion of their formative boxing years learning their craft at the Horizons Boxing club. Professionals and amateurs from various weight divisions were interviewed. Four active professional and nine active amateur boxers were interviewed. Boxing remains predominantly a male sport. Since there has recently been a small but growing interest from women and girls, two female boxers were interviewed.

Six individuals in the position of coach, trainer, manager, or club manager were interviewed; the position of coach/trainer/manager was somewhat overlapping. Two of the interviewees never boxed in either the amateur or professional ranks, the other four boxed at either the amateur or professional level, or both.

Interviews were conducted with individuals who were new to the sport. Some had been in boxing for less than three months, still waiting, in most cases with anticipation, their first actual bout in the ring. At the other extreme, one interviewee has been involved in the sport for over 50 years as a boxer, coach, trainer, and manager. The interviewees ranged in age from the youngest of 13 to the oldest being over 60. Permission to do interviews with youth under the age of 18 were obtained from a parent or guardian (see Appendix C).

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Not all topics were covered in every interview. Only a limited number of issues can be addressed in any research project. The interview guide helped to keep the interviews somewhat focussed by addressing those topics more relevant to the research questions. In some cases, either through observations or conversations in the field, the researcher had already obtained answers to questions. For some individuals, certain topics were simply not pertinent. The guide helped to keep the interviews focussed by keeping the topics relevant to the originally formulated research questions close at hand. It also served as a reminder to ask for demographic information from the participants. The interview guide appears in Appendix A.

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWING

According to Lofland's (1971,75-76) *Analysing Social Settings,* structured interviews work best when there is a knowledge of the important questions or more importantly, of the main kinds of answers to the questions. In this case, it is a legitimate strategy if the researcher knows what is happening with the people he or she is interviewing. But a flexible strategy of discovery will be useful if the interviewer wants to know more about the events and lives of the people being studied. The flexible open-ended interview does not force the respondent to choose between alternative answers to preformed questions, but rather invokes what they consider to be the important questions and thoughts that are relative to a given topic. Thus, the open-endedness of the interview helps to elicit the richness and detail in the data, for which the qualitative approach to analysis is well suited. Open-ended interviews emphasize the discovery of the kinds of things (ie., events, interactions, social facts) that are happening and what they mean (because the interviewer does not know or presume to know), rather than noting the frequency of things the researcher presupposes.

The purpose of conducting semi-structured open-ended interviews was to allow the respondents to share some perspectives on boxing that would provide the research with a depth of understanding that might not be obtained through an adherence to a more objective and linear line of questions and answers. Ranson (1995: 114) suggests the researcher does not know in each case what is important and a better sense of the important topics often emerge after being in the field and completing a couple of interviews. So in order to discover their reasons and motivations for boxing, I encouraged respondents to tell me stories that might be related to how they started boxing.

I strived to maintain a supportive and caring attitude, which I think was genuinely appreciated by the interviewees. I found no conflict between being aware of my own emotional feelings and those that the interviewee was sensing while sharing their experiences. I do not think it interfered with my objectivity because I was aware I invested my own feelings in the interactions. I simply did not wish to maintain a purposeful and rigid stance with the express purpose of getting any specific kind of answer to any specific question, whether the question was preset or whether it surfaced during the more open-ended part of the interview. It was my intention to allow the interviews to unfold as naturally as a conversation, without the interruptions and possible distortions that might result if one of the people in the interaction was too much into a researcher's role and too intent on getting answers to predetermined questions. As a result, some very meaningful personal events in the respondents' lives that were related to boxing were brought to the surface. Often these events were directly related to the reasons for their motivations for starting boxing and their reasons for continuing. Still, the interview guide was available if needed, and was never too far from the back of my mind.

INTERVIEW RESPONSE

Except for one case where a participant was not overly talkative, the interviewees were more candid and forward than I had expected. In most cases, the interviews could have gone further into more sensitive areas than they did. I was cautious not to probe too deeply into areas that might make the subjects uncomfortable. Despite the fact that some of the interviews lasted 90 minutes or more, a number of clues suggested the respondents'

experiences of the interviews were positive. Upon completion, interviewees often remarked that the questions were interesting. A couple of interviewees actually stated the questions were very good. The most typical response from interviewees was that they had not previously contemplated the questions and they thought it was good they were asked to think about certain issues. They were often puzzled by the fact they had not seriously considered some seemingly obvious questions pertaining to boxing.

After an interview, communication between the researcher and interviewee tended to increase; as well as having more topics to discuss, the researcher and subjects became more at ease as they came to know a bit more about each other. On reflection, it could have appeared to others as though the researcher showed favouritism, as more time was spent in conversations with those who had already been interviewed. In a couple of instances, while in the presence of the researcher, an interviewee would jokingly announce to a prospective interview candidate that the researcher was a spy and would expose some secretive part of their lives by asking hard-hitting questions.

The interviews provided the additional benefit of adding an overall continuity to the research. While observing in the boxing club, interviewees would approach the researcher and remember something they had forgotten to mention that they now realized was important. Or more analytically, they would explain an event that was taking place in the present situation that related to a topic that had been discussed during the interview. This was more pronounced for trainers and coaches. In the field they began to take on the role of key informants, at times providing the researcher with a running commentary-like analysis of what they thought were the meanings of social interactional events as they were unfolding.

Possibly, given the small social setting of a boxing club, some of the subjects shared with others how their interviews had transpired. An atmosphere of interest developed in spite of the researcher's continued reassurances of the promise of confidentiality and anonymity to subjects before and after interviews. For whatever reasons, the effects were positive. As more interviews were completed, other boxers in the clubs became not only more enthused, but more curious and interested in cooperating in the research.

INTERVIEW PROBLEMS

Interviews were conducted at boxing clubs, at people's homes, and in my office. All of the interviews were tape recorded. The on-going transcription of the interviews brought to my attention some problems early enough to avoid repeating. On two interviews done in the offices of boxing clubs, the tapes were filled with background noises from boxers skipping and hitting the bags. These locations had been chosen to accommodate the interviewees, so as not to impose any more than necessary. With some minor difficulties, they were eventually successfully completed. The ability to vary the speed in the transcriber was helpful in overcoming the problem. But mostly, simply straining to hear what was being said and listening to the same excerpt a few times was all that could be done.

Trying to control anything about a social setting leads to frustration. The field researcher learns the requisite qualities of compromise and innovation. Seldom are situations in the field idyllic for the social researcher. Unlike the lab where variables can be controlled and manipulated, in the boxing gym, real boxers are going about their lives. In one instance, I drove across town and waited for over an hour at a pre-arranged meeting place in order to

get an interview; an interview that turned out to be well worth waiting for. Despite missing three scheduled appointments, the respondent kept insisting time and again that he still wanted to do the interview. In this instance, I drove across the city and waited at a prearranged meeting place. After waiting over an hour for him, I telephoned him again reminding him I was still waiting. He arrived in another half hour or so. My concern that his difficulty in keeping a commitment to an appointment would be an indication of what to expect in the interview was completely unfounded. The interview was rich and descriptive, his willingness to talk about his experiences in boxing well worth the wait.

Studying and watching, all the while staying out of the way and allowing the social setting to unfold as naturally as it would if the researcher was not there, requires continual attention to courtesy and respect. And it presents a dilemma for the researcher. As a participant-observer, becoming a part of the social world of boxing and going deeper into that world in part, required forgetting about the role of researcher. The researcher enters further and further into the new social world but does so with caution, continually being held back, always remembering where they started from, their purpose and their role as a researcher, so as not to go 'native'[2]. The constant awareness and attention to respect that is required while situating oneself as a researcher is demanding. Simultaneously, the researcher is a part of that social world in one way, but not a part of it in another way; preventing a full knowing and understanding of that world the way the subjects being studied know and

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2. Anthropologists use the term to describe a researcher who gives up their original starting point and research as a result of entering so deeply into a culture and fully accepting the beliefs and values of the new culture that they stay and practice within it.

understand it. So, many times when I went to the gym, I tried to leave my researcher's hat at the door, and rather than pretending to be a boxer, actually strived to become one.

COUNTING

Over the four month period, I monitored the attendance at the two boxing clubs. With respect to the remaining clubs in the City of Edmonton, the approximate composition and membership was ascertained from a couple of visits to each club, and through discussions with coaches or managers. The procedure used in quantifying was rather rudimentary. However, during a couple of visits to the two boxing clubs, the over-representation of visible racial groups (without knowledge of members of non-visible ethnic groups) quickly became apparent. Without rigorously counting each and every member of the boxing clubs, the intention was to gain a confident approximation that would be sufficient to confirm this over-representation.

EXITING THE FIELD

As suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1995), the etiquette of departure from the field is a little bit like departing from any other social setting in everyday life. After investing considerable time becoming part of a social setting you will be missed upon leaving. I regularly kept the participants informed about the progress of the study. Their interest in the progress of the study was a good sign of their continued cooperation throughout the study. When I began to spend less time in the gym and more time analysing and writing they knew of the reasons, and my absence was somewhat justified; an important point of consideration

particularly in the social arena of the gym. You do not simply walk away, without explanation. Even when training, if dates are missed a sense of guilt overcomes the boxer for not attending. I experienced this myself when I missed a few days training. Boxers continually go through this and so, being away from the gym, in the return there are often feelings of guilt for staying away.

After four months in the field, I began the process of exiting the social setting. This was accomplished through continued but decreased involvement in the boxing community: working out occasionally at the gym, and dropping by the gym when important events were expected to occur. The ongoing and gradual withdrawal from the field provided feedback from key informants and boxers during the analysis and writing stage of the thesis. Since I had started attending boxing events during the formal stage of field work, I continued to attend whenever boxing venues were offered in the City of Edmonton. Although completely unplanned, these boxing cards became an unexpected and valuable source of data.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data in this study are the product of more than four months of field work. It includes transcripts of tape recorded interviews and field notes compiled from observations and conversations in the gym. My subjective experiences as a participant-observer which are detailed below ("In The Gym") also inform many facets of the data.

The following procedure was used in analysing the data. I should point out that, unlike quantitative procedures that can follow a more structured course of action, qualitative research deals more with events of a more subjective type (such as felt experiences and

satisfactions derived as related by boxers), so it often makes the actual procedures difficult to identify and specifically detail. At times a narrative approach was used in the analysis, and at other times a question and answer format was used.

The interviews were transcribed and field notes[3] entered into a word processor. Following transcription, hard copies of interviews were printed on eight and half by eleven inch paper. By drawing a line down the right side of the page, a margin was created allowing room for text summaries to be written. After reading and rereading, important topics and themes from the text emerged. In some cases, answers to specific questions became apparent. At other times, without seeking answers to specific questions, meaningful themes and concepts emerged. The theme of 'origins of boxers' developed in this fashion. The themes and concepts did not emerge from a simple summarizing of the text, however. At times, a few words or ideas were expressed in a conversation. Then later in an interview, sometimes related ideas that were closely tied to the earlier themes reappeared. But summarizing text would not provide the links between the two separate incidents. This was accomplished through a synthesis of concepts and ideas that formulated primarily in an inductively logical way in the researcher's mind. To a degree, this research suggests the world of boxing is a unique culture. Any categories constructed from the data are not necessarily naturally occurring categories. Rather, they were chosen with the intention of helping explain how some groups became involved in boxing.

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3. A huge amount of data was amassed by way of field notes alone. There still remains some field notes that were scratched hurriedly in a small coiled notebook, other bits and pieces of conversations and observations written in boxing programs, that I wish to return to in the future for further examination.

Although the evidence gathered from this study provides some basis for generalizing to the larger Alberta and Canadian boxing scenes, the intention was to explore two boxing clubs and their members in the City of Edmonton. The next section chronicles my journey into the gym, and includes a description of the boxing gym. My experiences in the gym allowed me to learn some of the concepts, terms, language, and most importantly, the meanings of the 'social things' in the boxers' taken for granted world.

IN THE GYM

Historically, boxing clubs have tended to be somewhat removed from public view, often found in subaltern locales. Of the two boxing clubs that were the major focus of this study, one club was in the basement of a Boys and Girls club, the other on the second floor of an office building. Both are in what would be considered near, if not in, the inner city. Since boxing clubs are not typically located in middle class urban areas, location is a probable factor in determining who enters the clubs. A tough sport like boxing equals a tough environment with tough individuals, and the kind of social domain not normally in close proximity to middle-class social researchers. I have participated in competitive sports (e.g., football and hockey), and although my primary interest was investigating the social world of boxing, I was also hoping to acquire some boxing skills and get myself into better physical condition.

I believe I have some things in common with many of the boxers I interviewed. I grew up in a family of four children and my mother was widowed early in my childhood. It is difficult to have an objective perspective of my own life, but given the facts of my

background, it would be reasonable to say that it was one of disadvantage. The stories told to me by many of the boxers reminded me of experiences from my own past. Had there been a boxing club in the town where I grew up, I suspect I would have been attracted and involved in boxing. Most, if not all of the boxers, regardless of their ethnic or racial group, shared some of the same dreams, values, and aspirations I recall having as a youth. So, in many ways I found their dreams and aspirations (at other times their lack of realistic dreams and aspirations) familiar. Like many of the youth in the study who expressed their dislike for school (there are exceptions of course), as a youngster I had very little interest in school. Although I can claim absolutely no special understanding of what it is like to be discriminated against because of the colour of my skin, I sensed in some ways their background experiences to be not so different from my own. Thus, it seems useful for me to share my experiences of training in the process of becoming a boxer.

Although I frequented all of the boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton, I spent most of my time at the Horizons Boxing Club and the Sundown Boxing Club. From frequenting these and a number of other boxing clubs, and from reading descriptions of boxing gyms like 'The Stoneland Boys Club' in Wacquant's (1992) study and the 'Memorial Boxing Club' in Sugden's (1987) study, it is apparent that while no two boxing gyms are identical, there are many similarities. The following description, constructed mainly from my impressions and experiences inside the Sundown Boxing Gym, depicts a kind of generic boxing gym.

My first visit to the Sundown Boxing Club was in December 1996. It was winter in Edmonton, the temperature around minus twenty Celsius. Inside, it was hot and muggy. About fifteen boxers were working out. As a seasoned hockey player who has sat in the

dankest of dressing rooms with twenty men after a hockey game, the smell was more than expected. The sweat coming from boxers working out, the odour drifting out of two spit pails conveniently positioned, one at each corner of the ring in which two fighters were sparring, blended into the smell of boxing and permeated the inside of the gym. It is a year later and although the smell likely remains, having spent time in the gym training, I think of it less. Perhaps, like the intensity of the smell of a pig barn, overwhelming at first, eventually it diffuses into our other senses or becomes taken for granted and unnoticed.

Entering the boxing gym, my eyes are pulled to the walls, which are plastered with caricatured black and white posters of fights from boxing's past. Glossy coloured posters signal the modern era. Posters of the greatest fights of all time are found in most gyms and whether old or new make up a category that could be called the untouchables: Lewis versus Schmelling, Frazier versus Ali, Holyfield versus Tyson. A second group of posters form part of a temporary rotational kind of cycle. These are posters of local fight cards, especially when they hold the names or faces of fighters from the actual club. These posters stay up as long as possible, but eventually are either covered over or taken down to make room for a new fight card that has taken place, again, especially if it holds the name or picture of a local fighter from the club. A variety of other pictures and posters also cover the walls: the rules of boxing, fouls of boxing, techniques of boxing, and various routines used by boxers.

Finally, boxing gyms have on their walls famous sayings and cliches reminding boxers of how to act and what it takes to be a champion. Napoleon's famous words, "He who fears being conquered is sure of defeat" hang on the walls of many boxing gyms. Other well-known cliched phrases include: lead with speed, follow with power; your opponent is

working harder than you are; no guts no glory; no pain no gain; and, real boxers are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. What remaining space is left is taken up with mirrors. Here, the boxers hone their skills (as if there was an actual opponent in the mirror) while shadowboxing, practising their footwork, and refining their punching skills.

Boxing gyms house an assortment of punching bags: heavy bags, speed bags, pole bags, and other bags of which I was unable to ascertain their exact names. The gym usually has an area set aside for skipping. When the gym is busy or crowded, and provided no one is sparring, the ring can also be used for skipping. But sparring would take priority over some one who has no room to skip. Another area of the boxing gym includes an assortment of weights and various other types of exercise equipment such as exercise bikes and universal gyms. Most clubs have some sort of a mock or simulated ring. Rings are likely expensive, so there is some variation in the size and quality of the rings found in boxing gyms.

A unique sound, alien but not unpleasing to the ear, emanates from a combination of alarms, music, rhythmical skipping, and from boxers pounding various bags. In every gym I entered, there was some sort of a device for timing the circuits and routines of the boxer. These came in various styles from home-made devices consisting of a clock with a timer and incandescent light bulbs to a more expensive modern timer. The newer version comes with three lights, red, amber, and green and offers two settings. The length of round can be set at two or three minutes, and the breaks between rounds can be set to thirty seconds or one minute.

In most gyms, music forms an integral part of the work-outs. Different types of

music can be heard, depending sometimes on the pecking order of the boxers in the gym, at other times depending on the club manager or the person in charge of the club at the time. At the Horizons Club, the manager would occasionally flex his muscle by imposing country music on the young enthusiasts. At times, he tried to offer them a bit more culture by playing contemporary or classical music. When boxers had their say, a range of music, sometimes representative of the multi-ethnic diversity of the environment was noticeable. Hip hop, rap, funk, and other brands of music could be also be heard. The overriding element in music for boxing seems to be a strong beat. Skipping, bag work, shadow boxing, and other boxing routines are not only more tolerable but more enjoyable when done to music with a beat and a little rhythm.

While the sights and sounds and smells of the gym confront you as you enter, it is the busyness of the activity, a noticeable rhythm, and an obvious purpose to the activity taking place in the gym that upon first sight seems most apparent. The gym is filled with boxers skipping and punching various bags, coloured lights flashing on and off accompanied by buzzers and alarms, all of which is customarily accompanied by music. The crescendo noise of the skipping and punching, occurring in three minute intervals imposes a sense of orderliness on the whole affair.

The sport of boxing requires cardiovascular conditioning. This involves roadwork or running which normally takes place outside of the gym. However, the vast amount of time and energy is spent in the gym training and going through the workouts. The workouts are strategically patterned and timed into circuits meant to simulate the conditions of an actual boxing match. The purpose is to build up and prepare the boxer for the eventual boxing

match. Over the course of a boxer's career, the actual time spent inside the ring in formal boxing contests would account for only a fraction of the total time and energy committed to the sport.[4] Routines inside of the gym can include skipping, footwork, shadow boxing, hitting the bags (an assortment of speed bags, pole bags, and heavy bags), hitting hand pads, and sparring. Sparring can take up a fair amount of the boxer's time, especially as it escalates in intensity and frequency in the weeks leading up to a boxing match. Other training tools such as weights, running machines, and exercise bikes are at times also employed.

My experiences in the gym will help to illustrate the training process involved in becoming a boxer. A number of coaches and trainers advise and tutor me. Frankie, the club manager at the Horizon's Boxing Club, has taken various coaching clinics. He started me out by setting up a routine and teaching me some of the fundamentals of stance, posture, footwork, and basic punches. A number of other coaches and trainers monitor my progress and offer me advice whenever they can help.

Boxers at different levels of ability, professional or amateur, have different routines and combinations of routines that make up a circuit workout in the gym. As do most physical workout programs, mine begins with stretching. This takes approximately ten minutes, loosening up everything in the body from the head to the toes. The stretching is

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4. Here is an approximate calculation of the total minutes in the ring for a boxer with 200 amateur fights and 30 professional fights. [200 amateur fights x 3 rounds x 3 minutes + 30 professional fights x an average 8 rounds x 3 minutes = 2520 minutes or 42 hours]. Compared to the total amount of time that would have been required and committed for any boxer to sustain a career that long, 42 hours would be minuscule.

followed by two levels of footwork and punching, aided by mirrors so I can watch myself. The first level involves assuming the boxing stance, and simply moving forward and backwards, weight on the balls of the feet, fists, arms, shoulders relaxed and in the proper positions, the left fist a couple of inches in front of the left eyebrow, the right fist lower, a couple inches away from and protecting the right side of the face, jaw, and chin area. This stage involves mainly moving forward and backward and side to side in a kind of bounce or rock and roll fashion, all the while maintaining the correct boxing posture and remaining in good balance. Three rounds of three minutes each with a one minute break between rounds completes stage one. In this first stage, without throwing any punches, but simply holding up the arms and fists in front of the face in the proper position for the full three minutes was deceivingly more difficult and strenuous than expected.

In stage two there are three more rounds with one minute breaks and the pace is increased slightly. Stage two adds one punch, the left jab, to stage one. Maintaining balance and posture in the correct boxers' stance, now moving forward with the jab, and backwards with the hands up in the correct position. The left jab is the mainstay punch in every boxer's arsenal. Although the jab is a seemingly simple movement, to perform it properly with speed and a reasonable amount of power (though power is not the primary reason for using it), for me at least, the jab has taken more perseverance and commitment to master than any of the other skills in boxing. The workout in the gym is repetitive. I perform the same movements over and over and over, and improvement comes slowly as my skill, speed, and power increase simultaneously, each depending on each other. The coaches watch, monitor, and give me suggestions, but mostly I learn by repetition, feeling the movement and trying to

seize it when I have done it correctly. This provides me with a tremendous sense of accomplishment. As I began to eventually feel how well I was throwing the jab, I also recognized my skill and prowess in the jab was largely determined by my strength and stamina. Improving requires doing it over and over and over, which required that I work on increasing my strength and endurance in order to increase my level of skill. In the beginning my arms and shoulders would tire very quickly, the jab would become loose and weak and I was unable to throw it cleanly and efficiently. Yet at the same time working on the jab technique with fatigued arms and shoulders motivated me to do it properly since the more efficiently it is performed - the fist pistoning straight out and back - the maximum amount of physical force can be created from the least amount of energy expended.

Following the first two stages or levels, stage three largely involves the first two stages plus incorporating more punches. Moving back and forth, side to side, jabbing, right hands, left hooks, and other punches or combinations of punches are also thrown in. Three more rounds of three minutes each completes stage three. Taking these three stages further to an advanced level, incorporating head movements, bobbing and weaving, creatively adlibbing as though boxing against an imaginary opponent, and one has reached the shadow boxing or fourth stage.

At this point, after the stretching and footwork and shadow boxing, a more serious boxer, especially if preparing for a fight, might spar at this point in the workout. Having sparred only a couple of times and with modest intensity, my subjective experience of sparring is limited compared to most boxers. Nevertheless, my fear of being hit too hard or getting injured, my fear of looking bad, or my fear of being embarrassed by not being able

to complete a full three minute round of sparring, are meaningful because these were the same kinds of fears and anxieties that were reflected back to me by others in the gym. Though sparring sessions, when properly monitored by a boxing coach or trainer, are intended to provide specific goals and outcomes, occasionally something else occurs.

The sparring session is not recorded on the official record of the boxer but the sparring session can become like an actual boxing match. People in the gym often stop and pay attention to sparring. Though the sparring is not taking place in front of an audience, there are often other boxers hanging on the ropes around the ring. And the boxers in the ring know their moves are being watched, not simply by an audience of possibly unknowledgeable watchers, but instead by peers who are scrutinizing and seeing their strengths and weaknesses, both physical and mental. On occasion, a sparring session can quickly and easily take on the same dynamic and intensity I have witnessed between two boxers in a formal boxing match. Instead of a forum for learning or achieving some specific goals, like working on a particular punch combination, or for the benefit of the conditioning of the boxer, sparring sessions can erupt into a battle royale. The session can become a contest between two opponents where the goal to win has clearly become as important as working on any one specific skill, and the egos of the individuals prevent them from pulling their punches. With each punch thrown, the intensity increases. With each punch thrown, the will to find a way, to show who is the better boxer, increases.

Returning again to my workout in the gym, following the footwork, punching, and shadow boxing drills, (which now total nine three minute rounds), I continue into either three rounds of hitting the heavy bag, or some combinations of rounds (two or three) of

hitting the hand pads. The hand pads are held by a coach or trainer[5]. In the hand pad drill the coach calls for various punches and combinations of punches from the boxer. He watches and monitors, giving words of encouragement, constantly reminding the boxer to snap the left jab straight out and back. The trainer moves around in the ring while holding the pads at different heights and different angles, requiring the boxer to move around while punching the targets at different heights and different angles. All of this is much more strenuous than hitting a heavy bag which basically returns to the same position, notwithstanding the swinging motion after each punch. In the hand pad drill, the trainer can speed up the pace or slow it down, depending on how much time is left in the round. By measuring the intensity of the punches he can know when the boxer is tiring and then, through his encouragement (sometimes yelling, but in a tone of voice taken by most boxers that is meant to be good for them), he can push the boxer to a level of fatigue, that in my own experience, the boxer can not easily replicate on his own by simply hitting the bags.

Following the hand pads or heavy bag (or some combination of these routines) come three rounds of skipping. The speed bag routine is the last routine in my workout. I find the speed bag one of the more enjoyable drills. When mastered, it provides a musical rhythm and sound very pleasing to the ear. In my first couple of weeks on the speed bag, my goal was to keep my arms and fists up for the full three minute rounds, paying little attention to trying to keep it going at any steady or fast pace. My goal was simply to strengthen my arms

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5. Recently, an accomplished amateur boxer, anxiously awaiting his first professional fight has taken me under his wing and holds the hand pads for me occasionally. Hopefully, coaching me will help him learn more of the boxing game as he prepares for his first pro fight.

and shoulders to the point where I could at least hold them up their for the full three minute rounds.

There are a multitude of variations of circuit and routines that could be practised in the gym depending on a boxer's level of skill and conditioning. Professional boxers and amateur boxers at more advanced levels might go through more strenuous routines and perform them with a higher level of skill. At the Horizons Boxing Club, the routines - physically challenging enough on their own - are frequently preceded by a run of up to five miles in duration. According to Felix, a former member of the club, anyone taking longer than forty minutes to complete the run is considered somewhat of a slacker. The order and sequence of routines can also be varied. After training for a couple of months, I modified my routine. The skipping and speed bag were moved from the beginning of the workout to the end of the workout. I could then push myself harder, knowing they were the last legs of the circuit. Before modifying the workout, I was often so tired from these early strenuous stages that I had difficulty holding my arms and fists up, thereby making it difficult to work on refining and honing footwork and punching skills which were the supposed intention of these drills.

Having described my research methods as a participant observer, and having provided an insider's view of the world of the gym, I now return to the research questions guiding this study. The next chapter outlines the ethnic and racial composition of the members of the Edmonton Boxing Community. Throughout this thesis, pseudonyms replace the names of individuals and boxing clubs.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EDMONTON BOXING COMMUNITY

BOXING CLUBS AND THE BOXERS

The Alberta Amateur Boxing Association (AABA) governs the affairs of amateur boxing in the Province of Alberta (Canadian Amateur Boxing Association Official Text, 1996). AABA is a member of the national governing body known as the Canadian Amateur Boxing Association (CABA). CABA is a member of the yet larger organization known as Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur. Nine boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton were on the Alberta Amateur Boxing Association's list in 1997. The number of boxing clubs was greater than the number of boxing gyms, partly due to the fact that a number of boxing gyms housed more than one club. The number of clubs changes from year to year as new boxing clubs open and others close. However a number of clubs in the City of Edmonton have long and reputable histories with well established amateur boxing programs. During the course of the research and writing of this thesis, at least one new boxing club has opened and two existing boxing clubs changed locations, all in the inner city area of Edmonton.

Boxing clubs provide a number of functions for their members: from recreational fitness to a more serious involvement in boxing. Some clubs cater mainly to amateur boxers at competitive levels. In one instance, boxing is part of an inner city youth program. Most of the clubs would officially welcome people who wish to try boxing as a form of fitness and conditioning, regardless if they have intentions of boxing competitively or getting in the ring for sparring.

The population of interest in this study are boxers, coaches, trainers, managers, club

owners, or other members of the professional and amateur levels of boxing in the City of Edmonton. Boxing clubs outside of Edmonton proper, such as Spruce Grove and St. Albert, though visited by the researcher, are not considered in this study. The boxing population is not limited in scope to those members of the boxing community who have actually been in the ring in an amateur or professional bout. It also includes those newcomers who expressly stated they intended or expected to enter the ring to fight or to spar.

One of the problems in defining a boxer and thus measuring the population is the fact that it is not uncommon for youths (probably less so for adults) to drop in and out of boxing. Some return in a week, a month, six months or a year, and some never return. According to trainers and coaches in the sport, probably less than one in ten people who walk into boxing clubs will stick around long enough to consider it their sport. Boxing is very self selecting. Most people who try the sport will decide fairly quickly if they like it. After years of observing the different kinds and types of people that come and go from boxing clubs, coaches and trainers say that predicting who will have the 'hook' sunk into them, and end up sticking around the sport, is difficult if not impossible.

The population of boxers in Edmonton, including both amateurs and professionals, is a rather fluid and mobile group and as such, is greater than the members of formally organized boxing clubs. At any one time, boxers and participants may or may not be attending a formal boxing club. Using attendance at boxing clubs as a means for measuring the population would exclude some individuals for a number of reasons.

There is at least a small percentage of boxers who may never be observed in boxing gyms, yet who would rightfully identify themselves as boxers. They may have a bag (speed

bags or heavy bags) hanging up in their basement or garage; they could also be under the guidance of a personal coach or trainer. While they could easily identify themselves as boxers, without attendance at a formal club, they would not be often, if ever, seen in the boxing community. All that it would take for them to enter into a formal boxing match would be to register with one of the proper boxing associations, amateur or professional, and complete the required medical tests.

The boxing season is not as clearly defined as in many other sports. An amateur boxing season has events that mark the season to some degree. The occurrence of bronze, silver or golden gloves, competitions, and provincial and national tournaments, can signify peak times of the year for a boxer. Prior to and during these times, boxers are more likely to spend time in the gym. Still, for reasons other than preparation for events, some boxers who may simply be more serious can maintain a more frequent and consistent regiment of boxing. In the case of professionals, an upcoming fight usually signals more time in the gym. The fight could then be followed by a rest period of varying duration. The fighter may take a break from boxing, may need time to recover from an injury, and in some cases, may contemplate retirement. So it is difficult to know when a boxer who has not been in the gym for a month or more has taken a hiatus, taken a rest, or has retired from the sport. At two clubs that were closely observed by the researcher for four months, there were local boxers, amateur and professional, whose names continually came up in conversation, but were never observed at the gyms. Being part of the conversations suggests some form of involvement and consideration as still part of the boxing community, albeit indirectly. Although they were not active in boxing, these individuals remained part of the sport, and their return in the

future was expected.

Thus, the number of people who are involved and interacting on a day to day or month to month basis in a boxing gym is fluid. It is those boxers and other members who were observed coming and going during the four months I was in the field that, for the most part, comprise what would be considered the population investigated in this study.

The number of people boxing in an organized program or attending any of the various boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton, at the amateur or profession level, would be conservatively less than seven hundred and fifty (750). Taking the population of Edmonton at three quarters of a million (750,000), then approximately only one tenth of one percent (.001) are involved in the sport.

ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMPOSITION

Following is a brief illustration of the approximate composition of the Edmonton boxing community with particular attention to two boxing clubs. The counting and quantifying of members into groups was not undertaken with the precision required to do complex statistical analysis. The purpose was simply to gain a broad sense of ethnic and racial composition. Hence, the members were placed into the four categories of Native Canadian, visible and non-visible[1] ethnic and racial groups, and White. Although non-visible ethnic minority members are White, because of there unique ethnic backgrounds they are

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1. An example of non-visible minorities are white individuals who have immigrated to Canada and brought with them language, religion, or culture that has put them at a disadvantage, and resulted in their minority position.

often treated differently than White Canadians. Therefore, this analysis distinguishes between the non-visible ethnic members of the Edmonton boxing community and the White members. Without systematically counting each and every member of the various boxing clubs, the intention was to gain a confident approximation that would be sufficient to determine whether members of visible minority groups were over-represented.

The approximate ethnic and racial composition of the two clubs monitored, the Sundown and Horizon Clubs, are shown in Tables 4-1 and 4-2. I did not request to view boxing club record books or documents to verify the numbers. The numbers are compiled largely from my observations over the four month period supplemented by many informal conversations with key informants and participants at the clubs.

Table 4-1: Approximate Ethnic and Racial Composition of Sundown Club

SUNDOWN BOXING CLUB	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Native Canadian*	15	40
Visible racial origin	8	22
Non-visible ethnic origin	3	8
White	11	30
TOTAL	37	100

*Aboriginal descent includes Indian, Metis, or Innuit background.
Source: Researcher observations and key informants.

The tables show the percentage of White members to be about the same at both clubs, around 30% of the members. About 40% of the members of the Sundown Club were Native

Canadian, while a smaller percentage of the membership of the Horizon Club was Native Canadian, about 17%. At the Sundown Club, 22% of the members were in the visible racial group compared to the Horizon Club where 43% of the members were of the visible racial group. Both clubs had a similar proportion of members from the non-visible ethnic group, the Sundown Club 8% and the Horizon Club approximately 10%.

Table 4-2: Approximate Ethic and Racial Composition of Horizon Club

HORIZON BOXING CLUB	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Native Canadian	5	17
Visible racial origin	13	43
Non-visible ethnic origin	3	10
White	9	30
TOTAL	30	100

Source: Researcher observations and key informants.

Table 4-3 shows that when the two clubs are combined, Native Canadians account for approximately 30% of the membership, visible racial groups accounted for about 33%, non-visible ethnic groups about 7%, and Whites accounted for around 30% of the members.

Table 4-3: Ethnic and Racial Composition of Both Clubs Combined

BOTH CLUBS COMBINED	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Native Canadian	20	30
Visible racial origin	22	33
Non-visible ethnic origin	5	7
White	20	30
TOTAL+	67	100

+Approximate number of boxers that came and went during the four month period at two clubs.
Source: Researcher observations and key informants.

The number of paid members changes from month to month at the various clubs, so actual membership or attendance, though only one measure of involvement, would not completely represent participation as members might be attending intermittently or not at all. So, the numbers are more of an attempt to reflect the actual attendance and involvement in the sport over the four month period from May to August of 1997.

In Table 4-4, the 17 participants in the interview sample are shown by gender and the clubs from which they were chosen. Fifteen males and two females (one from each club) were interviewed. In spite of the belief that there is a growing interest in boxing from females, only two or three other females (in addition to the two that I interviewed) were observed to be seriously involved in the sport at either of the two clubs. Neither was there much controversy or debate over their social interaction in a largely male dominated sport. Since the Sundown Club was the site of participant observation, more interviewees were

chosen from that club. The ethnic and racial composition of the interview sample was chosen with the attempt to approximate the actual composition of the two clubs and is shown in Table 4-5.

Table 4-4: Interview Sample (n=17)

BOXING CLUBS	MALE	FEMALE
Horizon Club	4	1
Sundown Club	11	1
TOTAL	15	2

Table 4-5: Ethnic and Racial Composition of Interview Sample: Both Clubs

ETHNIC/RACIAL MEMBERS ORIGINS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Native Canadian	5	30
Visible racial origin	4	23
Non-visible ethnic origin	2	12
White	6	35
TOTAL	17	100

Source: Researcher observation and key informant.

Table 4-6 shows the approximate composition of the Edmonton Boxing community including the two clubs already detailed and an additional five clubs operating in the City of Edmonton proper. The approximate ethnic and racial composition of the remaining clubs

in Edmonton were ascertained by visiting those clubs and through discussions with coaches and club managers.

Table 4-6: Approximate Ethnic/Racial Composition of Edmonton Boxing Community

ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMPOSITION	PERCENT
Native Canadian	25
Visible racial origin	34
Non-visible ethnic origin	6
White	35
TOTAL	100

Source: Research observations supplemented with information from coaches and club managers.

BOXING EVENTS

Over the course of the field work, three amateur and two professional boxing cards were attended. These events showcased many of the boxers from the two clubs that were studied in this project. All of the amateur boxers were from Canada, the large majority from the Edmonton area. The professional events included a number of boxers from outside of Canada. These boxers have been excluded from the count to provide a picture more representative of the Canadian scene. The ethnic/racial composition of these events corroborates the above demographical portrait of the Edmonton boxing community. To a small degree it begins to reflect the Alberta boxing scene.

Table 4-7 shows the number of boxers involved in the five boxing venues and their

ethnic racial composition. The data were gathered through researcher observations at these boxing events. The boxing programs also proved beneficial, in some cases providing information like home town, age, and record of the boxers, as well as feature write-ups on some of the boxers. In total, the five boxing events featured 42 bouts for a total of 84 boxers. Seventy-seven of these boxers were Canadian and their ethnic and racial identities are shown in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7: Ethnic and Racial Composition of Boxing Events

ETHNIC/RACIAL ORIGIN	AMATEUR	PROFESSIONAL	COMBINED
Native Canadian	25 (42)	3 (18)	28 (36)
Visible racial origin	8 (13)	7 (41)	15 (20)
Non-visible ethnic origin	2 (03)	1 (06)	3 (04)
White	25 (42)	6 (35)	31 (40)
TOTAL	60 (100)	17 (100)	77 (100)

Percentages in brackets.
Source: Researcher attendance at boxing events and boxing programs.

The boxing events exhibit a similar pattern of representation in terms of the ethnic and racial composition of the participants. A higher percentage of Native Canadians (42%) participated in the amateur events, compared to 18% that took part in the professional matches. Combined, the 28 Native Canadians in the boxing events accounted for 36% of the fighters, which is close to the combined proportion of membership at the two clubs studied (30%), but greater than my estimate of the proportion of Native Canadians participating in

the Edmonton boxing community (25%). Members of visible racial groups accounted for the largest percentage of boxers in the professional matches, where 7 boxers accounted for 41% of the fighters. At the amateur level, only 8 of the 60 fighters, or 13%, were members of the visible racial group. The White boxers that took part in the boxing events accounted for 42% of the amateurs and 35% of the professionals, which closely represents the percentage of White boxers found in the Edmonton boxing population (35%).

SUMMARY

The above information with respect to boxing competitions illustrates that the ethnic and racial composition of boxers might in fact differ among competitive and less competitive boxers. Of course, at different times of the year, especially in amateur boxing, there are different reasons for taking part in boxing venues. Hence, participation in boxing matches should be used only as one measurement of the ethnic/racial composition of more serious boxers. However, it does provide a supplementary means of illustrating the ethnic and racial composition of boxing in Edmonton, particularly at the more serious level.

The estimated percentage of ethnic and racial minorities comprising the population of the Edmonton boxing community can not be directly compared to the proportion of those minority groups in the greater Edmonton population, since the data are not easily available. Citing the earlier literature that 9% of Canadians (adults over age 15) are members of visible minority groups, and, further, that many of these visible minorities live in the urban metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, it could be argued that visible minorities in the Edmonton boxing community clearly outnumber the proportion found in

the general population. With respect to the Aboriginal composition, the 25% of the larger Edmonton boxing community, and the 30% of Aboriginals who were observed at the two clubs studied, far outnumbers the proportion of Native Canadians, which according to Statistics Canada (1996) was only 3.8% of the population of Edmonton in 1996.

Thus it has been shown that, to a lesser degree than Afro-Americans are over-represented in US cities, in the Edmonton boxing community, ethnic and racial minorities are also over-represented. In the next chapter we turn to some possible explanations for this over-representation. Specifically, what is the social origin of the boxers and how did boxers in the Edmonton community first enter into boxing.

CHAPTER FIVE

REASONS FOR ENTERING THE WORLD OF BOXING

Having demonstrated the over-representation of visible minority boxers in the Edmonton boxing community, we can now turn to the question of why they are over-represented. How does a person find his or her way to a boxing club to participate for the first time? Or, it might be better to begin by asking how do people come to know about boxing?

There are many paths leading to boxing. Yet, while unique stories were heard as to how individuals ended up in boxing, there are were also some common patterns. Such patterns highlight the existence of social structures in which social interaction occurs, and influence individual choices to become a boxer.

In this first stage of analysis, experiences and events from boxers' lives helped shed light on how they became aware of the sport of boxing. The following words attributed to boxers, are to the best of this researcher's ability and knowledge, their actual words, transcribed from tape-recorded interviews. As mentioned earlier, in order to protect, as much as possible, the confidentiality of respondents, the actual names of all individuals and boxing clubs have been replaced with pseudonyms.

THE FAMILIES OF BOXERS

Virgil is an Afro-Canadian who grew up in a small town in Alberta in the 1930's. In this earlier era of boxing, before television had arrived, he listened to boxing on the radio. Interestingly, listening to the radio, Virgil would not have been able to see, that like himself, Joe Lewis and Sugar Ray Robinson were also Black people. Of course he knew it was the

case. Virgil now coaches and trains amateur and professional boxers. He recalled listening to the old Marconi radio. As we reminisced about his start in boxing, he talked fondly of the early days, as if boxing formed a part of the social fabric of his family.

> Virgil: I was a young guy, fourteen years old when I started boxing, I started on the farm and ah, ahh, there was just a couple of us, my brother was, my brother, he had fought in Calgary and Toronto, he was a older brother, he came to, at Christmas time he came home, and I liked boxing, I was crazy about boxing, I used to listen to it on the radio, we had an old Marconi radio run by a car battery and all Friday nights, the Friday night fights, I was young then and I'd listen to Joe Louis and Ray Robinson, I wanted to be a fighter like those guys you know, so I started fighting, and ah fighting amateur fighters

Later in the interview he recalled more about his family's influence on him:

> Virgil: Well, my mother loved it, yeah, she didn't go to the bouts, my dad used to take us all over the place, oh yeah he'd drive us here, drive us there and I can recall my brother that boxed, he was just a little bit older than I am, we used to pack our stuff [laughter] this was funny, and we'd go to these little small towns that would have a sports day and we'd do exhibitions, and they'd take the hat and pass us money, we were amateurs, sure, we travelled all over like that, let's go down here, they're having a big sports day, let's go there, take our stuff in case they'd want us to do something, so, we'd do...

Charles, a white Canadian, entered the boxing scene early. His father was involved; it seemed like the thing to do.

> Charles: Well I was born into a boxing family, as far as me and boxing, I was born into a boxing family, my father boxed in the navy and my, then he went on to be a trainer after the navy, he trained my older brothers, any house we lived in always had a gym in the basement, I was born with a gym in the basement, so, for me as soon as I was old enough to walk down the stairs I was in a gym, I just boxed my whole life, and I don't know, I think maybe when I was young, hard to believe, but I was a quiet shy kid, not the, kind of a scrawny kid and stuff like that, and ah I'm not even sure if I liked boxing, I don't think I was pressured into it, it was just, kind of thing, like you know, I felt like its the thing I had to do, everybody around me was doing it, my dad was, I was surrounded by it, and I think when I got old enough to make, to know what, I was enjoying doing, knowing, in order to make my own choices then I, you know, I chose it on my own, I don't think I was ever forced into it, its hard to explain eh, I mean probably if I'd been in a different family and a different environment I

would of never discovered boxing...

Jesus is of a mulatto background, and the importance of boxing in his family is also obvious. His dad represented Canada very well by winning an Olympic medal in boxing. He talked about how his dad, after retiring from boxing, used different schools and whatever other places were available to train fighters, while he and his brother would often tag along.

> Jesus: 14, when I, you know, actually started doing it, but I've been doin it ever since I was a kid, 7 or 8, and wasn't old enough to do it, cause my dad used to run like ah, he used to use borrowed school gyms, training guys, you know, hanging the bags, and that, so I've always known it, and seen it done eh, used to, when I was a kid, have the kids, hold his hands up, and hit em, and stuff like that, so

Later in the interview, he said more about his family::

> Jesus: Yup, always, when he went to the club, me and my brother would tag along, and you know, fire on the boxing gloves and stuff, like that, its almost like second nature, almost, some of it...

You might think it unlikely that Christy, who immigrated from Poland, would be a boxer. In fact, her introduction to boxing was almost accidental.

> Interviewer: Did you think about it before you started?
>
> Christy: Not really, well I wasn't really interested in the sport, cause well, there's not, there wasn't a lot of, um, TV or anything right, so I wasn't really interested about the sport. My brother, he's a DJ [diskjockey] right, he was DJing at the, what was it, I think it was the Bronze gloves, yeah, he was DJing at the Bronze gloves right, and my brothers like, hey Christy, you want to come, cause he wanted to just take the whole family, to see it, like a couple of friends, so I'm like okay sure whatever, since the, everybody else was going, right, so I just went, I'm interested in helping my brother cause he said that I could help him switch a couple of the lights, I was just watching them fight, whatever.

Simon, of Aboriginal background, grew up in a remote town in northern Alberta. He remembered watching the Olympics on CBC, the only channel they had, when he was eight years old and telling his dad that he wanted to be a boxer. At the time, Simon never knew

his dad had been a boxer. Later, when Simon started boxing around the age of 14, his dad dug out some old boxing medals and trophies that were being stored at his relatives and gave them to Simon.

> Simon: Well I was never pressured into this, into boxing, I never, like my dad never had any of his trophies or medals laying around the house when we were kids, they were always in storage or somewhere at my gramma's house or at my aunts or uncles wherever they were, he has given me a trophy now that he had, that he had to go and find, but ah, out of three kids in my family, I'm the middle child, I have an older brother, and a younger sister, and then ah, my two parents, but ah, they've been divorced for the last two years, but I, we were raised in a good background, we always had ah, we were never in the bottom of the barrel in poverty, we were always ah middle class and then for the past few years a little bit higher through my fathers job and what not, but I would say I started boxing, I enjoyed boxing from when I was 8 years old and seen it on tv, like you said with the Olympics watching Willie de Witt and Sean O'Sullivan get Olympic silver medals

Later in the interview, he said more:

> Simon: Mmm, yeah, I'd say ah, he told me, that he'd never actually wanted us to box, because of how hard boxing is physically, mentally, ah, heartbreaking in different situations, it is very difficult because you have to diet when you're a growing boy, a growing person, you have to diet, a lot of exercise, and then when you stop exercising it takes its toll on your body, but ah, he said he never had any aspirations for us to be boxers, and he never wanted, I had to force him to coach me, I had two fights under a different coach and being 14 years old and wanting desperately for my dad to coach me, to coach me, well if you don't coach me, I'll quit school at 16, so then we kind of after I stopped running you could say, and we both calmed down a bit, we talked, we talked about the situation and how the majority of father son combinations never work, and my older brother was into boxing at the time, so we all decided okay were going to do this, and we started it and after I had my two fights and we were training everything went well, my older brother he he kind of shied away from it, it wasn't his thing, like he enjoyed it, enjoyed everything but it was just you know it didn't have its calling at all, he had all the natural skill a fighter could want, its like ah I still get nervous to this day to spar with my older brother and he only had 3 amateur fights, and I have all these, like I said, my credentials and whatnot...

Axel, who recently immigrated from Poland, knew very little about boxing before he started. He remembered wondering out loud on occasion why his father watched boxing

on television and if there was not something more meaningful to watch. So he was not surprised to find his dad supportive when he began boxing. Axel was introduced to boxing through a friend, another immigrant to Canada.

> Axel: Yeah, yes, I never was actually interested in boxing, before I started, I got involved through Carlos (a professional boxer).

Later in the interview he elaborated on his entry into boxing.

> Axel: Yes, well I went with him, it was actually, the thing is, it was after the church, it was Sunday afternoon right, ah, after the church I didn't want to come home cause I wasn't hungry to eat the dinner or nothing right, and he, he just asked me, why don't you come to club, see, he, how it is, you know what I mean, and I go, yeah, why not, you know, I had some time to kill, so we went in there, he was working out with George I think and you know, and then, I you know I looked, I was just watching at first right, and then the next week he asked me if I want to go in there cause George is not coming and if I want to spar right, so, I, I just went in there you know, I had my jeans on right, my white shirt, and cause it was straight after church, and it was, just start slugging and stuff like this and I go wow this, this might be good, so you know I start coming I think the next day I came it was Tuesday or so, and then I start coming more often and often, so I bought a membership and that's how it started.

Courage is a Native Canadian who is undefeated in three amateur fights. Her introduction to boxing came partly through an academic program, not through her family. But to some extent, she was an exception.

> Courage: Um, well when I first started being interested in it, was probably in 1992, I was doing, it was called the Strike Program, I was working at life values, and they introduced us to a program called Strike, and it was, ideally, a boxing/martial art, so we did some sparring there, I didn't actually compete or anything but, until I came into Edmonton.
>
> Interviewer: And that Strike was through an academic program?
>
> Courage: Yeah, it was a martial art, we were working with delinquent children.
>
> Interviewer: How about brothers, cousins, did you know anyone personally before you started, that had boxed?

Courage: No, none of, actually none of our family was into boxing, no never.

Terry, another Afro-Canadian, suggested to me that his formative boxing years were not as structured and as organized as the club in which he now coaches and trains amateurs. Terry never had far to go to discover the boxing world, growing up just 50 yards from the gym.

> Terry: It, it was boxing, and it was competitive, just that it wasn't properly structured, like there wasn't a boxing organization that um, runs the show, you know, it was the type, like, I'm going to put on a boxing show and you could look for your own officials to work, and the qualifications and the most important thing was, is that you were able to help

Later in the interview, he added more details.

> Terry: I'm not sure, maybe maybe its ah, how you get into boxing would be, how it would relate to these guys, but in my situation, there was a gym maybe 50 yards from where I lived, and I, as a little boy I used to go and watch the guys box and then, um, I, I, just liked to become a, I find there's so many bigger guys you know, and I would emulate some of the guys, and gradually you just get into it without getting up one morning and saying well, I want to be a boxer you know, you may watch a movie and say well you wanted to be a boxer, I didn't do that, I'd say it started, it sort of grow in me like.

Quincy, a Native Canadian born in Edmonton, stated his dad told him about the boxing club in the basement of the Boys and Girls club that Quincy had joined. Quincy explained what might have motivated his dad to suggest he take up boxing. He had been getting into fights at school and in the streets and so it might have been an easier transition for him into the sport when he finally arrived in the boxing club.

> Quincy: Yeah, well, no no no, like, not like that, I got, I went like, like, I like to street fight a lot right, but before I started boxing, I used to like to fight on the streets a lot, and I like, I like the sport so I'm like, hand to hand combat and stuff like that, fighting, so I like to compete and fight and win.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, but still, how did you ah, so what did you think well, I need to

search out a boxing club or what, you didn't go through the telephone yellow pages at that age?

Quincy: No no, my dad wanted me to box, to get, to want, he like, got me into it, he told me that there was a boxing club down here and it was one of the best and so, like yeah, cool, cause I joined up at the boys and girls club here eh, I joined there and so, the same night my dad, went and asked about the boxing club so, my dad got me into it and the next...

later on in interview, he restated his reasons for entering boxing.:

Quincy: My, my dad said I was getting picked on a lot at school cause I, like I, I'd have a big gang after me, this and that, for fighting and getting into trouble, and he wanted me to learn how to defend myself, and discipline, he wanted discipline.

Frankie was never involved in organized boxing as a child. He did get into a few fights at school though. He has taken some of the Amateur Coaching clinics and is a trainer and coach, as well as the owner/manager of the Sundown Boxing club. His roots in boxing go back to his childhood, when relatives would often compare him to a little Rocky Marciano. His mother also had a strong influence on his entrance into the boxing business, the opening of the boxing club being somewhat of a collaborative project between them. He is a self-confirmed Mohammed Ali fan and likes to talk about that era of boxing. Frankie never really had the opportunity to get into the amateur boxing ranks when he was younger, as he grew up in the West End and the nearest boxing club was downtown. I asked if he could remember when or why he might have started having serious thoughts about the sport:

Frankie: Well boxing was the, you know, the highlight sport, like you always, all my relatives and that compared people to boxers, you know, boy he hits like Rocky Marciano, and he ah, you know, looks like a little Marciano and that, unfortunately at that age, I didn't know what I was being compared to

Later in the interview, Frankie provided some more information.

Frankie: I had met ah, I'd probably met Charles back then, but ah, ah, that, that was one of the kid's names that were being tossed around when I went over to visit my mother, and three or four other names, I can't think of them, you know, those were the names I was hearing when I went to visit my mother at work, but she was, she was involved with the sports department...well, I always loved amateur boxing, well not amateur boxing, but I always loved boxing and ah ... my mother was, had been involved prior, with Canadian Native Friendship Centre, she saw what sports could do for, you know, all kids.

David, a white Canadian, started competitive boxing at the age of 9 years old. He had been getting into a bit of trouble and fighting. He stated his dad might have put him in boxing to see how he fared in the ring since he was fighting anyway. So, in part, it was through his dad that David was introduced to boxing. David took to the sport quickly as he piled up an impressive succession of wins in the amateur ranks before losing his first bout. He said he felt respected by his family, friends, and the community for his achievements in boxing.

David: Yeah ah, I just, my dad took me to a gym, because I was always a fighter, I was a tough kid and I would get in trouble at school, so my dad thought that ah, he'd try this gym out, so I went there and I was 9 years old, started workin out, had my first f [he begins to say the word fight] competition, when I was 9 and ah, stuck with it over the years, took breaks off and on, but ah...

The stories of Virgil, Charles, and Jesus and other interviewees reflect how the family often plays an integral role in the socialization of boys into sport. In these cases, early socialization included an introduction to the boxing world. They came to know boxing, mainly if not exclusively, through the family. This generational cycle continues with Charles's own family:

Charles: You know I got 3 boys, eh, and I think, man would that ever be cool to have 3 sons, one's 17 one's 16 one's 15, all Canadian champions, at whatever age in, the last ones, there's six years spread between the oldest one, but the other two are a year apart, but any ways, you know, having a team of fighters, 3, 3 champions all

with my last name, my boys.

Interviewer: Right, right, like a stable.

A couple of weeks after the interview with Charles took place, having had more time to contemplate the pros and cons, he mentioned to me he was not so sure he felt strongly against his sons taking up the sport. Though his own boys are under the official amateur boxing age of 11, occasionally, on slow days at the gym, or on a Sunday afternoon, his boys also tag along. Sometimes others in the boxing community bring their underage children to the gym at which time a family-like atmosphere overshadows the rigid structure of the boxer's world. The boys play with the equipment, maybe skip for a few seconds, put on headgear that is too large, gloves that are too large, and have fun punching at an assortment of boxing bags, most of which are too high. They go in the ring and do a bit of sparring with the encouragement of mom and dad or anyone else who happens to be in the club.

A couple of points are worth considering. Of the 'white' sample of seven interviewees (one female), only Charles' dad boxed formally. In general, the others referred to their fathers as fighters, but never formally involved in boxing. The 'white' boxers tended to come to the sport from a further distance as compared to the remaining 13 of those interviewed, who spoke of their closeness to the gym either while growing up, or through some form of family connection to the sport. The 'white' minority in the sport had fewer family connections and were usually not raised with a knowledge of boxing.

The distance one has to travel physically or mentally is a factor increasing the likelihood of who will become a boxer. Jesus and Terry grew up physically close to a gym; Charles referred to his own basement as a boxing gym. If some of the boxers interviewed

were not physically close to a gym, they were either close to or surrounded by people who were involved in boxing. Frankie's mom was involved in the sport. Simon's dad boxed. Virgil's comment sums up how family influences led many youth into boxing.

> Virgil: When I boxed? Oh, well see that was sort of bred in our family because my dad liked boxing...
>
> Virgil: And my brothers boxed, all of us, every one of us, seven boys and they all boxed and I'm the one, I'm the second youngest so naturally, there's something bred there.

FRIENDS

Friends are another important means of introduction to the sport of boxing. Axel, Felix, Bert, and Trevor, came to their first boxing club with a friend. Most expressed during the interviews that they actually had little interest in boxing before they started, but they had expressed interest in learning to fight, martial arts being mentioned in three cases. Felix said he had always been intrigued by boxing, but it was likely him and his brother's intentions to get into the martial arts that motivated him to go a boxing club with his friend.

The first time Trevor, a white Canadian, came to the boxing club was with a friend, who stopped coming shortly thereafter. He could not recall if anyone in his family had ever boxed. He wasn't sure exactly why he wanted to box, except that he liked fighting and always wanted to be in boxing since he was young.

> Trevor: I played hockey and I always wanted to be in boxing, since I was little, I just I don't know I would always get into fights and stuff, I kind of enjoyed fighting, and it was like a sport that allows that, and fighting, no one really approved of it, and there was a sport that approves of, so that's what you do in that sport so, kind of enjoyed it.

Later on in the interview he continued his explanation of how he had become a boxer.

> Trevor: No I came with a friend, that boxed here, but he didn't box very long, he only came the first day, and then he quit after that, like he used to box but he didn't come very often, he didn't do it much, then he came with me, brought me here, then that's all, he stopped after that.
>
> Interviewer: So in a way, he was your introduction to the club?
>
> Trevor: Not really, like cause that same day, I called a different club, and I was going, I was interested in joining, but it was way farther than this one, and he told me about this club, so I came here, so I was going to join one way or another.
>
> Interviewer: Let's backup for a sec, so you ah, back to before you started a couple months ago and ah this person you knew that boxed and you came here with him, was there other people at school um, that suggested to you maybe, well heard you got into a street fight why don't you take it into the ring.
>
> Trevor: Nah, no one, I don't know, boxing, people don't really I don't think, be told to think of it as a good sport for kids to be in, you don't really get much respect, just like body builders don't get respect in their sport, no one ever offered, I would, thought about it since I was like 9, yeah I wanted to go into it.

Felix, a white Canadian, knew very little about boxing before he started. He and his brother, a big influence in his life, often talked about getting in to the Martial Arts. In school, Felix developed a reputation as a fighter; as long as he can remember he believed it was something that he was good at. Though he never got formally involved in boxing until he was 17, he said he always loved to fight.

> Felix: The very first time, ah, my friend said lets go to this boxing club, and I was 17 years old and it always intrigued me, cause I've always wanted to be a fighter, not necessarily a boxer, but I've always wanted to be in the, maybe karate or kung fu field, because my brother, who is a big influence in my life, was always wanting me and him to get together and do this, unfortunately my brother passed away and ah, I sort of always had that in the back of my mind, so he took me to this boxing club, my friend, and ah, the guy there, it was the Native Friendship [Centre], and the guy...

Later in the interview:

Felix: Rick Jones, was his name, and ah, so, after that he didn't want to go back and I sort of felt, I don't know, uncomfortable going by myself so I never went back, but it always stuck in my head, that day, always, always in the back of my mind, thinking, geez you know, so, one day, I, I did go back, and I, I decided in my head before I went back that I was going to see this thing through until...

Later in the interview he indicated that his family had not had an influence on his boxing career.

Interviewer: Your dad never boxed?

Felix: No.

Interviewer: Uncles?

Felix: Nah, but they were very tough men.

Bert, another white Canadian, entertained few thoughts about boxing before he actually started. Growing up, he had been more interested in the martial arts. After getting into a fight he decided to follow up his urge to try the martial arts. He also wanted to be prepared in the event he had to fight again. After he got in the gym and found out he did not much care for the martial arts, he discovered boxing instead.

Bert: It was a friend of mine, we were going to start kickboxing, and we never really got around to it, until this one day I got into a fight, I don't know, but I think I told you about that, I got into a fight at West Ed, West Edmonton Mall, and I was fighting an old friend of mine and a bunch of his buddies jumped in and I got, won the fight, like I was pretty pissed off, so I said well fuck that, I'm not, next time that happens I'll kick all there asses so I went and started kick boxing, and then, I just didn't like kickboxing, I liked having my feet on the ground too, I went into boxing.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you remember if your dad boxed?

Bert: No, never, never.

EASY ACCESS TO BOXING CLUBS

In chapter two, I suggested that affordability and easier access to boxing clubs located in inner cities might account for over-representation in boxing for minorities living in those areas. Perhaps in the disadvantaged areas of some of the larger American cities, proximity is an important determinant of who boxes. However, this study, in the City of Edmonton, does not provide strong evidence to support this assumption. A lot of young people who live close to the gyms do wander into the clubs and look around. Some of them stay or come back later to join up. But an equal number of youth seem to come some distance, brought by a parent, friend, uncle, or in other cases by someone involved as boxers or trainers themselves.

After getting to the club and deciding to stay involved, many interviewees found that the club was in fact inconveniently located. Many of the boxers suggested they come to the club in spite of the time and distance necessary to travel. For many boxers, as is evidenced in the interview sample, it was not the location of the club per se, in the inner city, that was an important reason for their entrance into boxing at all. Trevor lives in the west end of Edmonton. He made it clear he was going to join a boxing club one way or another no matter where it was located.

> Trevor: Not really, like cause that same day, I called a different club, and ... and I was go, I was interested in joining, but it was way farther than this one, and he told me about this club, so I came here, so I was going to join one way or another.

Christy takes the bus from Pine Ridge, a well off neighbourhood of Edmonton and it takes her an hour to get to the club. Courage, who learned about boxing through school, now lives in the west end, certainly not within walking distance to the club. Emmett lives

in a distant area of town and takes an hour, one way, on the bus to get to the club. Henry also lives a long distance from the club. He began to participate when his friend suggested it to him, not because of easy access to the club.

Quincy probably best illustrates an instance where proximity to the club was a more important part of the reason he discovered boxing. Quincy grew up close to the gym, first joining the Boys and Girls club upstairs from the boxing club before eventually becoming a boxer. Quincy sees his dad as being an important part of the reason for becoming a boxer, as it was his dad who suggested he try out the boxing club.

From the interviews, and in talking to many of the boxers at both clubs who have been involved for a while, a picture of where the boxers come from emerged. For a small number of boxers in the study such as Charles and Jesus, the boxing gym was convenient and accessible, but it was closeness in another respect that was responsible for their becoming boxers. It was not the physical closeness in terms of proximity to the inner city gym that was a factor, since neither grew up in the inner city. Their discovery of boxing resulted from their fathers' involvement in the sport and because their fathers took them along to the boxing club.

TOUGH NEIGHBOURHOODS

Even though Edmonton does not really have "tough" neighbourhoods such as the ghettos of large American cities, the two boxing clubs that are the focus of this study are nevertheless located in the inner city of Edmonton, which by comparison is tougher than neighbourhoods in other areas of the city. Thus, in one sense, the location of the club does

play a part in who enters the boxing scene. Though Quincy lives in the inner city close to the Horizon Club, most of the boxers I interviewed who have been involved for durations longer than six months live outside the inner city. Thus, the tougher inner city environment may prevent many middle and upper class youths from attending. Charles related a story about why one boy might have stopped coming to the Sundown Club. Charles's club was located in an even tougher area of the inner city than where he presently trains his fighters.

> Charles: And I had, I had a number of drunks that I had to throw out of there, like they'd come wandering up the stairs, you know and drunk, and mostly natives not that that's the issue, but you know they'd come up drunk and "oh, I'll get in the ring with anybody" stuff like that and then I'd have to talk to them nice, some guys, I'd have to literally you know drag em down the stairs and throw em out, when your a 14 year old kid or 12 year old kid from ah, you know an affluent family in the west end, and you come to a gym and you see that well, we had this kid coming here, he wasn't at my old gym, he didn't make it long here, and he was spoiled, he seemed like a really tough kid, he was wrestler, really ah, and this is just this year, he just stopped coming the last couple months, ah, he was a wrestler in school, and ah, the best wrestler in his school, he said the only one that he could practise with was his coach, he was coming in a car on the week end or something and Frankie had given him a ride home the first couple days, and then I give him a ride home, then one day I was here and Frankie wasn't here, and he'd been coming early after school, and it was about 6:30 and I was just arriving and he was done, and he sat there and he sat there, and I said, how come you're not going home, well its, can I get a ride from you, and I said, well you can get a ride from me I said, but ah, you know, you could be home 5 times by the time I get you home, and he said that's okay I'll wait, and I never thought much about it, and I give him a ride home, and then, another night, a couple nights later, same thing, I said no wait, well actually I've got to go the other way, I'm not going north, I got an appointment, and then it came out, he was scared stiff to get out, um you have to walk up (the name of a street) and there's a bus stop there and that's where he catches the bus, and he'd had to do it one night, and he didn't want to do in there, and I said, why, and he said, fuck, its rough over there man, some of the people, Indian people and stuff like that, and I says, I said you worried about ridin the bus over there, yeah, he says I don't like that, and he was real, and he quit coming, now whether or not that was it, I don't know, I mean, and this is, 15 year old kid, I, and I said, I told him about the Barrydale and like he knows where the Barrydale is, I said I used to train at the Barrydale, what would you of done there, he said I would of never gone there, he said there's no way I could, [pause] shit I had kids too young to box coming up there, and they were coming up there late, 9, 9:30

> at night when it was dark out and there was pack of 4 or 5 of them hanging around, they'd come up and hit the bags, they'd be smartallekin, trying to steal equipment or stuff, and run down, its like, I guess the point I was making, is that, that was a protected kid eh.

A WAY OUT OF DISADVANTAGE

Charles a veteran of the boxing game for many years, himself a highly regarded amateur, and now an active and respected trainer, coach and promoter in the Edmonton community, responded to the idea of the few opportunities for minority youths. He suggested that boxing can provide them with a safe home or someplace to feel they can achieve something. He talked about how the members of the Horizons Boxing Club are like a family. He explained how Quincy, who had come from a difficult family situation, could very easily have ended up getting into fights, doing dope and all the rest of it, if it was not for him finding the boxing club.

Most of the interviewees perceived boxing as a vocation, but not necessarily a career in which they could making a successful living. Most of the amateurs I interviewed gave the impression they were going to turn professional. But when it comes down to it, a friend of mine, Simon, who won a couple of Canadian national amateur titles in his division, and is scheduled to turn pro, has been having a lot of trouble simply breaking into the professional fight game. He has had his first fight cancelled. Knowing of the difficulty in getting fights at the amateur levels and the frequent cancellations that occur, with the money it cost to register as a professional, there appears to be a number of large obstacles for him to overcome just to begin a professional career. The difficulty and obstacles he is encountering

seem large, even though he has what would seem a proven and reputable background in the sport. David, a white professional boxer with four fights, suggested there are possibilities, but it does not take long in the professional ranks to realize how unrealistic it is to expect to make a living in the sport.

Yet Henry, a Native youth, continually talked about how he was going to get a lot of amateur fights under his belt, and prepare himself for the pro ranks, wanting to turn professional as soon as possible. And Quincy, another Native Canadian, who is compiling a lot of amateur fights also talked strongly about turning pro as quickly as possible.

Felix's story best reflects the difficulty in making a living in boxing. Felix's story like David's, shows that even contending for a Canadian national championship belt in Canada, which takes a tremendous amount of hard work and luck, does not have that great a financial reward.

RESPECT

Some spectators may find the values and beliefs the sport of boxing promotes as manifestly violent and thus difficult to comprehend. Since boxing is perceived by many as a sport with extreme physical risk, where personal injury to oneself and the opponent seems almost certain, it is the boxer's point of view that may help those on the outside better understand the social dimensions of the sport. The stories told by the boxers interviewed, together with notes derived from talking to many other boxers in the field, help this researcher comprehend the social logic of boxing. It may in part be respect, a latent factor, intangible to the outsider, that provides the 'hook' that makes boxing a normal and logical

activity for those who participate.

As Geertz's (1971) analysis of the Balinese cockfight suggests, participation provides symbolic significance and status achievement and helps explain the social dimension of the activity. In The Balinese cockfighting game, its spectators, bettors, and cock owners participate in a symbolic world of status rituals and hierarchies. Owning a cock, betting on a cock, in effect, most any of the activities related or revolving around the cock fight imparts a level of status or recognition to those who are involved. And this status, (respect if you will) translates and overlaps frequently into other areas of the community and the society in which they move.

For disadvantaged groups who are exploited and discriminated, where barriers exist for opportunities in mainstream society, boxing may offer a path that leads to respect. If a member of a disadvantaged ethnic or racial group has few alternatives outside of the boxing arena where they feel respect is achievable, the allure of the boxing ring may be attractive. The sport may provide an environment where boxers find support from people of similar backgrounds and situations, perhaps others who have also been the target of prejudicial attitudes.

One of the key informants in the study coined the term 'hook' as a way of expressing the perplexity of the attraction to boxing. His pugilistic point of view is from inside the subculture of boxing. He has had a successful boxing career, having acted as coach, trainer, manager and promoter. Subsequently, he knows most aspects of the amateur and professional ranks of boxing. When Charles spoke during the interview, and in numerous discussions in the field, his own actions and emotions reflected the passion he believes is

inside of the true boxer. He revealed that true boxers likely know if they have the hook inside of them before they begin to box or else they confirm it quickly after they start.

There may be a combination of different reasons why any one boxer has the hook within him. One of the reasons, maybe more so for minorities, may be related to the desire and the need for respect. When we are in the 'majority' position, not having been discriminated against, we may take for granted the importance that simply having respect from other people holds. For the boxer, the pursuit and attainment of respect might appear as a reward of enough value to make it worth the risks of any impending physical consequences. When the question is posed, "why do you box, what do you get out of boxing, or what does boxing do for you?" the first thought to come to mind would overwhelmingly be something like "It's about respect". The words from boxers interviewed in this study suggest there is a belief within the boxing subculture that respect - self-respect and respect from others - can be realized through boxing.

Virgil has been a tireless volunteer for amateur boxing in Edmonton. He is retired but still trains and coaches both amateurs and professional boxers. He has been around the sport of boxing all of his life, having started as a young boy at the age of 14. In the following quotations, Virgil defines boxing in his own words:

> Virgil: But, I would define it like this, it's a sport where you learn a lot, it's a thing where you learn a lot, you learn to respect people.
>
> Interviewer: So, it's about personal?
>
> Virgil: Yeah, you learn to respect, respect all people you know, 'cause you learn that as an amateur when you first start fighting, as an amateur, 'cause the moment you step into that ring, and you're out there by yourself, and the other guy's out there by himself, now he can beat you or you can beat him, but when that's all over you know,

I got to respect these guys you know, so you sort of grow up in life and think "well I got to respect everybody, because he's a man too, you know."

I suggested to Virgil that it seemed like a contradiction to learn respect from a sport with an appearance of intent to injure.

Virgil: No no, um, I find boxing teaches you more so, because, because that's an injury type of thing where if I punch you and you punch me, hey, this guy means business, so now I got to respect him.

Virgil suggested, referring to youth who may be getting into fights and other kinds of trouble, that they should learn about respect from boxing.

Virgil: Now once they come into the gym and they learn how to fight, that's when they, when they start to respect other people, hey look now, this guy deserves respect and then when they go out in life they always think that, the same way, everybody deserves respect.

Virgil said a lot of young people who come to boxing with an "attitude" get turned around after they get in the ring with an experienced boxer.

Virgil: I used to throw lots of them in with him, I'd say give him a beaten, 'cause he thinks he's King Tut.

Interviewer: And all, I, all you had to do is just show him, teach him about the sport?

Virgil: Yeah.

Interviewer: He doesn't have to have a personal grudge or vendetta? (referring to the experienced boxer who in this case teaches the inexperienced boxer a lesson)

Virgil: No, no, it's no personal thing...yeah, well when you're getting kids that way, you're getting kids with attitudes, some of them, not all of them, you get some that got good attitudes too, but you start getting kids with bad attitudes and you got to teach them, they're here to be taught, so this is how you teach, you teach them to respect people first, and once you teach them respect, they get your respect, well now you can teach them anything.

Interviewer: And they'll listen maybe eh?

Virgil: Yeah, they start to listen too, but they got to gain respect.

Near the end of an interview with Henry, a Native Canadian, he told me what boxing meant to him:

> Henry: I don't know, I think it's, it's about respect, I like it, it, because it's about respect eh, like if I could like beat all these good guys, and then they're all, like these good boxers, like hey man, this guy you know, like I'm, I'm basically in it for the respect you know...if like, if you fight a guy, like who's really good and you're just some guy with like five fights, even though you lose, but, you, you, people think you should of won, you're gonna get lots of respect.

> Henry: You're gonna probably have them looking for bigger and bigger fights coming up, because they know you should've won, so, it's just the way I think it is, respect.

Felix, a white Canadian, said he learned a lot of lessons in the boxing gym. When you find out you are not as tough as you had previously thought you were, you learn lessons about life.

> Felix: Like I said, I only picked one fight in my life and ever since, ah, boxing, when I started boxing, I learned how to respect people a lot more in there, cause you never know who your gonna deal with.

> Felix: And ah, I've never picked a fight, since you know, since that one kid, but especially in boxing now, I know I'm skilled at what I do, but I would never, that's the last option for me, for me, I could never do that to somebody, I think it's, it's like when Jimmy [a much more experienced boxer] beat the crap out of me, it's like being raped you know, you're taking away a person's dignity when you hit somebody, so I leave that totally up to the other person, if he wants to throw something at me then I'll do, you know, I'll retaliate, but until that time.

Christy was born in Poland and has been in Canada for about five years. She said people at school often times treat her poorly. She told me she did not think it had anything to do with the fact she was from a Polish background. But she said people treat her different at the boxing club, like a member of a family. She said everyone just treats everyone the

same and no one laughs at her or anything like that. She told me what was so appealing about the Horizon Boxing Club.

> Christy: Well, just mostly everything, the people treat you with respect, they treat you, you're a part of their family.

Referring to different ethnic and racial groups represented in boxing and present at the Horizons Club, Christy suggested she was not aware that it created any conflicts.

> Christy: No, I don't know, each, everybody treats everybody equally right, I don't see any of the, no, like there is no people calling other people names just cause of their background, there isn't.
>
> Interviewer: Or their skin colour?
>
> Christy: No, not at all.
>
> Interviewer: Would you think it strange that the sport of boxing has so many different mixes of different people with different coloured skins and different backgrounds?
>
> Christy: No, I think it's normal.

Though Bert claimed he was never the instigator, he related to me he was in a lot of fights when he was in elementary school. He said he was a shy guy and maybe that was why others picked on him. But he says those people who used to fight with him, and disrespect him, now respect him, "all of em, everyone of em."

When speaking about who was likely to become involved in boxing, Bert said, referring to kids in ghettos of large American cities, "what else you gonna do?" Bert thought a lot of fighters come from "some kind of weird families." And when asked why he boxes, one of his responses was "it's all I really got to do". Referring again to Blacks in American ghettos, Bert had this to say about boxers.

Bert: Some guys, fighting on the street you know, getting shot at, and then they go in the ring, and it's easier for them, because they been shot at...plus, you like, your background like, if your dad beat you up, or your mom beat you up, and there was maybe a relative or something like that, you might get into it more.

David also believed that the more he boxed, the more respect he got from people around him.

David: Ah, boxing's just something that made me feel good, and I was proud of it, and I got a lot of, a lot of respect from my friends, and, and people in the community, and I liked it.

Terry is another tireless volunteer who gives four or five nights a week, plus weekends to help out at tournaments, to help amateur boxing in Edmonton. As an Afro-Canadian, he says he has often experienced discrimination. Referring to a number of incidents that have happened to him in Edmonton, he said, "you can try to ignore it, but sometimes it is dehumanizing." When talking about the Horizon Boxing club where he volunteers his time as coach and trainer he said that overall people get along well in the boxing club. He said if he didn't feel appreciated or if he felt uncomfortable he would not likely stay around.

Terry told a story of one youth who joined the boxing club who had a tattoo that read "I hate Blacks". He said he tried to give him a little extra special attention instead of harbouring bad feelings towards the boy. He wanted to show the boy that he was a good person in the event the boy had a bad experience with a Black person in the past. Terry hoped he could teach him or show him that you have good Blacks and bad Blacks, just like every other group of people. But the other kids tormented the boy about his tattoo until eventually he quit coming to the club. Here we see the group of 'boxers' making a statement

openly to the newcomer that his tattoo did not represent the kind of values that the fraternity of boxing tolerates.

Simon, a Native Canadian, admitted to being a bully when he was in school. He said he started boxing because he did not want to be known as some "dumb goon" and his thoughts suggest that doing 'something' with his life would help him command respect.

> Simon: You have no respect when you're a bully, but when you're an accomplished anything, whether it's a piano player to a boxer, you have that respect, you know, one way or another, whether a person likes you or not.

Simon suggested that Native Canadians (or other minorities) do not necessarily fight because of past discrimination against them, but at the same time he postulated that the boxing gym was a place where it is not only okay to fight, but in fact you are rewarded for fighting back.

> Simon: I guess you could say maybe a lot of kids do it because they want to be on an equal status, because I know kids, like I said boxers are a race of their own, whether they're Black, Hispanic, White, Native, maybe that's, maybe that's how they look at it as well, they're on an equal level with two people in the ring, Black versus White.

What boxers have in common and share with people whom are disadvantaged, people from a difficult and sometimes violent social background, and people from difficult family situations, is perhaps that they are searching for respect they are not finding in other social milieus. So a hook could be created in their lives partly due to a lack of respect from others around them and a struggle to get respect.

Some minorities who take up boxing may have possibly reframed prejudice into a lack of respect from others. Since differential treatment based on skin colour or ethnic differences are not based on any logical premises, it may be easier to make sense of

situations where one is treated unfairly by constructing them as situations where the other person treats them with a lack of respect. As they begin to feel they are gaining respect from others in the boxing ring, they sense a growing level of self respect as well. Simon described boxing's affect on him as a kind of progression.

> Simon: With me being a Native person, with my doing well, I just wanted to, I mean, the more I boxed, the better I felt, the more confidence I gained, the more respect I gained, the more I wanted to do better, the more I wanted to win.

Simon thought that you have the bully and you have the shy kid who gets picked on and maybe some times they meet in the boxing arena and learn from each other. He said the majority of the kids that start boxing had some sort of troubled backgrounds.

> Simon: In mainly trouble, not only liked to fight, but into crime, and maybe victims of physical abuse or something, and they have a lot of built up anger and rage, you say.

RESPECT OR "GETTING EVEN"?

The previous discussion argues that boxing may provide respect to members of disadvantaged groups. Or are young people attracted to boxing because it allows them to get even? Maybe their sojourn into the boxing world is a chance not so much to hurt the opponent, but rather to strike back, vicariously through their opponents, at those who have hit or disrespected them, in the past. Does boxing provide respect for a less than legitimate activity, or does it instill legitimate respect, as in the positive values that are posited as being provided through professional and amateur sport? The findings presented seem to indicate that many of the boxers came to understand and respect others in a truly legitimate way. As Virgil suggested, they go into the world as better individuals after having spent time in

boxing, their views on "intent to injure" might suggest.

Only one of the seventeen who were interviewed in the study stated he enjoyed seeing his opponent in pain - at first. On pursuing the topic, he admitted he meant it jokingly, and that he never wished serious harm to come to any of his opponents. The overwhelming impression from boxers interviewed was a genuine sense that they intended no physical harm at all to their opponents in the ring. Because the outcome requires defeat of the opponent by physical force, it increases the probability of injury. But this does not require an attitude of intent to injure on the part of the boxer.

The following conversation with Felix conveys the orientation of a boxer when in action, focussing not on injuring his opponent, but on another goal:

> Felix: I, I get such an exhilaration when I land a clean punch that it's, you know, the guy didn't expect it, it, the, for most people you know, they go, oh God, that's sick, but for me it's oh man, that landed perfect, okay keep em open, (whispering to himself) moving, moving, keep moving, and it's just like scoring a goal.

When discussing the idea of wanting to hurt the opponent in the ring, Felix was adamant about how he is too busy concentrating on what he is doing in the ring:

> Felix: You're thinking about fighting, you're not, you're not, that's all you think about, you're thinking about protecting yourself and trying to, trying to get the other guy out, but you don't, you don't think about is this the right thing to do...your thinking about, about ending it, and you hope to have it over as soon as possible, and well, but your also thinking, well, if I have to go the distance I'll go the distance, but, that's all you think about in that ring, you don't even see that referee, you, you don't even see him.

Felix suggested most of the hype in boxing is intended to attract an audience. For example, the pre-fight hype, where boxers might display an appearance of dislike for each other could be misconstrued into an intention of harm. But for Felix, contemplating

intentional injury is not necessary:

> Felix: But, it's not the way to do it, I know that, because I'm a 37 year old man, and I know you can fight and box, without thinking that you have to smash the guys brain out of his ear.

Thus, ethnic and racial minorities may see boxing as a way to gain respect in a society in which they are disadvantaged and in which they may have experienced discrimination. For the boxers who are white, because of their class, or for whatever reason they are disadvantaged, they may also gain respect through the sport. As respect is reinforced, it then becomes more of a motivation to continue. However, based on my interviews with boxers, it seems less likely that this respect has a negative undertone, that is, vicariously "getting even" with a society that has not provided equal opportunities.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

SUMMARY

For Virgil, Jesus, Charles, and Simon, these boxers practically learned about boxing as a way of life while growing up. They were heavily socialized into boxing through their family. Terry's environment, growing up only yards away from a boxing environment, suggests early socialization in a similar way. Frankie also had strong family connections to the sport of boxing, as his mother was involved in sport at the organizational and developmental levels. As a result, these boxers may have had a somewhat different outlook towards boxing imparted on them than those boxers who came to boxing via a different path.

Quincy, David, Felix, and Bert, came from somewhat troubled family backgrounds, and all of them were involved in fighting before they started boxing (though not all to the same degree of course). David's father took him to a boxing club as soon as he was old enough to begin boxing at the amateur level as he had already been getting in to fights. For these fighters, it was with the assistance of a family member (as in David's case), or a friend, or of their own accord, that they sought out a boxing club to enter into the sport. Once at the clubs, the encouragement of coaches and trainers played an important role in keeping them involved in the sport.

Trevor and Emmett are good students, from seemingly stable and supportive family backgrounds. They joined boxing because they like the physical type of sport. Axel, Christy, and Courage learned about boxing almost accidentally.

The majority of Native Canadian boxers who were interviewed, as well as other

Native boxers I had conversations with during the field work, had been in a number of fights before starting to box. They mostly came from difficult social environments and most were straightforward in discussing their fighting experiences before their involvement in boxing. In addition to their personal social conditions, they also related some of the experiences of blatant discrimination and prejudice they have experienced as minorities in Canadian society. Henry expressed it straightforwardly, yet nonchalantly, when he communicated how some people think, "you know, if you're an Indian, you're a nothing". For Aboriginal and other visible minority boxers, the idea of respect also stood out as an integral part, as either a motivation or as a benefit of boxing. Simon expressed this well, "You have that respect, you know, one way or another, whether a person likes you or not."

The white boxers who were interviewed came to boxing by a number of different paths. Only Charles underwent the socialization into boxing through his family in a similar way that many of the visible minority boxers experienced. For David, Bert, and Felix, in part, it seemed to be their inclination for boxing as a sport involving fighting, that played a larger role in their ending up in boxing, as they all had some experience with fighting outside of the ring before turning to boxing.

Axel and Christy are both white, but they have recently immigrated to Canada, and might be considered ethnic minorities. There introduction to boxing was largely by accident. Christy discovered it while attending a boxing event to help out her brother. She wanted to try it, did, and ended up enjoying it. Axel's friend Carlos, a professional boxer who immigrated to Canada from the same country, invited Axel to join him at the boxing club. Axel enjoyed boxing from the beginning and his involvement grew from that point onward.

The visible minorities, Virgil, Terry, and Jesus (though mulatto, he calls himself "half and half"), all had a strong socialization of boxing in their family background and their knowledge of boxing was a taken for granted part of their lives. Only Emmett, a non-Black visible minority who recently immigrated to Canada has no family connection to boxing.

For members of all of the different groups who were interviewed, the possibility of getting respect from others, and for themselves, may reflect their position of 'disadvantage'. Their sense of 'lack of respect', whether due to the colour of their skin, or the accent of their language, may pull them towards boxing, which they perceive as providing the possibility of gaining respect. In some instances, respect may be, in part, a latent unintended consequence they encounter after some duration in the sport of boxing.

The findings of this research suggest a stronger family connection to the sport among visible minorities, especially for Blacks, than for white boxers. Ethnic and racial background, because of family socialization, might be a more important factor in determining who enters the gym. Once there, the possibility of gaining respect, for all of the groups, as they are disadvantaged in one way or another, might be a more important motivation for them continuing.

The findings also suggest that easy access to boxing clubs does not appear to be as strong of a determinant in becoming involved in boxing as was shown to be the case in studies of American cities. The empirical studies of Sugden (1987) and Wacquant (1992, 1995) highlight the importance of the geographical location of boxing clubs in American cities. Sugden's research, in particular, argues the structure of the sport of boxing itself, where trainers and coaches in the inner city clubs exert considerable influence over the youth

involved in the sport, creates an 'exploitation of disadvantage'. Minority youths from difficult and disadvantaged circumstances are attracted to the gym because in many ways boxing mirrors the environment around it where youth learn the values of toughness required for the sport. Therefore, the structure of boxing is able to capitalize on the vulnerability of those minority youth members living in close proximity. In this study, the geographical location of boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton did not appear as a strong determinant of involvement in boxing. In fact, there was little evidence that boxers in the Edmonton boxing community are likely to live in close proximity to the boxing clubs. A majority of the boxers lived in various parts of Edmonton, outside of the inner city; in most cases the boxing clubs were not at all conveniently located for the boxers.

The familial connection to boxing in visible minorities that this study has presented might be inferred from Sugden's and Wacquant's studies, but not to the extent that the findings in this study have shown. This study has also shown the importance of 'respect', and how it explains who enters into boxing and who is likely to continue in the sport. Neither Wacquant nor Sugden's research directly focussed on this idea of 'respect'.

Using a Marxist analogy, researchers such as Sugden (1987), Wacquant (1992), and Weinberg and Arond (1952), have tended to present boxers in proletarian-like fashion; unconscious of their exploitation as they toil away in the gyms. However, in some ways the findings in this study point in the opposite direction. In the Edmonton boxing community, especially at the amateur level, the youths who entered into the boxing clubs were often looking for guidance, support, discipline, and a safe environment. A supportive family-like environment that includes volunteer coaches and trainers provide minority youths (regardless

or racial backgrounds) with a place where opportunities are possible. For the boxers interviewed in this study, boxing did promote and instill the positive values that are associated with sport: good citizenship, improved self esteem and confidence, a more positive mental outlook, and a moral conscience which includes respect for oneself and for others. If false consciousness in some way prevented these boxers from seeing themselves as being exploited, it did not obscure their perception of what boxing has done for them; for many boxers, boxing was an expression of freedom.

Generalized beyond the ethnic and racial composition of the Edmonton Boxing community, the findings suggest that belonging to an ethnic or racial minority group increases the likelihood of being exposed to the subculture of boxing. The historical patterns of ethnic and racial minorities participating in sports like boxing, with stronger familial connections, contributes to the likelihood that the existing pattern of over-representation of minorities in boxing will be maintained and reproduced. Further, the possibility (or illusion) of upward social mobility offered through boxing, the limited opportunities in other social domains and in some instances sporting arenas, and the striving of people in a 'disadvantaged' position to acquire respect, increases the probability of participating in the sport of boxing.

This research has shown that in Edmonton, minority youths are likely attracted to boxing for a number of important reasons. Two things seem of critical importance in determining who becomes involved. The most important may be the early exposure or socialization of boxing within families of visible minority groups. For individuals who were not exposed to boxing through their families (and for some who were), a difficult social

background where discrimination and a lack of respect were experienced are likely further social determinants influencing individuals to become involved in boxing. But, neither do the attitudes about respect, that are gleaned from the interviews, suggest the boxers in this study are motivated (at least not consciously) to box in order to 'get even' with anyone in particular.

For those with no family connection to boxing, they are often introduced to boxing by a friend or acquaintance. Once there, coaches, trainers and other boxers, can reinforce the idea that they can gain respect from others through boxing.

LIMITS OF THE RESEARCH

There are shortcomings and limits to any research project and the conclusions drawn from this study should therefore be qualified in some respects.

The individuals who were interviewed in this study ranged from beginners in the amateur ranks to veteran professional fighters to managers/trainer/coaches who have been involved in the sport for over 50 years. The interviews were conducted with individuals from each of the two clubs where I focussed the study. Edmonton has a number of high profile, internationally known boxers. One or more of the boxers would have been accessible, and would likely have consented to be interviewed. In fact it was recommended to me on numerous occasions when I approached boxers for interviews, that I should interview one of the prominent boxers. Since the study was meant to explore the way that boxers enter the sport and the social influences motivating individuals to begin boxing, these more notable boxers were given no more consideration in the selection of the sample than

the beginner boxer, or what could be termed the 'journeyman' fighter. Suffice it to say, every individual interviewed was an important part of the study.

At the same time, I realize that interviews with boxers who have been involved for a longer period of time in the sport, might have been able to identify social conditions surrounding newcomers to boxing that were similar to their own. Thus, they may have valuable insight about the social characteristics of individuals who are likely to take up boxing, in a similar way that key informants have special insight about individuals who box.

With two exceptions, I was able to either infer or get the information directly from the respondents as to their ethnic or racial identity. At times, I specifically asked the respondents how they would identify themselves. In most cases, they volunteered the information somewhere during the course of the interview or during a more informal conversation in the gym. With respect to the two individuals who never revealed to me their ethnic or racial identity, as I became better acquainted with them, I grew increasingly uncomfortable about raising the subject. The tables in Chapter Four designate an "identity" for each of the boxers who were interviewed. In the two instances referred to above, I have had to guess the ethnic or racial origin of which they would most likely identify themselves.

Since the majority of my observing and monitoring was conducted at two boxing clubs, Table 4-6, ('The Ethnic and Racial Composition of the Edmonton Boxing Community'), should not be considered as accurate as the other tables provided in Chapter Four (at best, the empirical findings in this study are offered as approximations). The findings upon which Table 4-6 are based were arrived at through conversations with a coach or club manager, who may have had less time to reflect on the question than they might have

me by coaches, trainers, and boxers of the two clubs where the research was focussed. The Edmonton Boxing Community is small enough that coaches and trainers know a considerable number of boxers at the various clubs in Edmonton, as well as the nature of the clientele they are likely to attract.

FUTURE RESEARCH

A number of connections between ethnic and racial minority groups and boxing that have been brought to the surface as a result of this study now require further exploration. Though the findings in this study did not illustrate the existence of a similar pattern, there may be a quality or characteristic found in the social structure of the families of Aboriginal boxers that is similar to the familial characteristic of boxing found in the families of the visible minority group. Further research, analysing a larger number of interviews with Aboriginal boxers could clarify this possibility, as well as pointing towards other possible links in the relationship between Aboriginal minorities and boxing that perhaps this study using a small number of Aboriginal interviews failed to reveal.

A good portion of the analysis in this thesis revolves around the origins of how boxers become involved in the sport in the first place. The data revealed certain patterns, and the analysis and findings appropriately followed the direction suggested by the data itself. In contrast to a focus on the initiation of boxers, a logical next step in the research would be a focus on the how the boxers perceive they have been affected by boxing. This analysis might include active boxers who have been involved for a number of years as well as retired boxers who had lengthy careers in the sport. The concept of 'respect' has been shown in this

who had lengthy careers in the sport. The concept of 'respect' has been shown in this research to be an important part of the reason for many members becoming and staying involved in boxing. A focus on boxers' perceptions of how boxing might have affected them might raise the idea of 'respect' again, uncovering another dimension to the concept of 'respect', and help to further the explanation of why minorities are over-represented in boxing.

Further, this qualitative analysis of boxing in the City of Edmonton has helped identify some of the social conditions that increase the probability of an individual becoming involved in the sport of boxing. A more quantitative approach to this research could help to illustrate some of the cause and effect relationships between belonging to an ethnic or racial minority group and becoming involved in boxing. A number of the variables could operationalized, and a questionnaire survey could be used. Useful social indicators would include, whether the parent of the boxer also boxed, whether siblings box, the social class and socioeconomic status of the parents, the educational backgrounds of the parents and boxers, whether boxers have a history of delinquent behavior, and importantly, ethnic and racial group backgrounds of boxers using a more comprehensive index scale. A larger sample of boxers, such as the population of Alberta amateur boxers, which could encompass more than 500 individuals, would provide the survey data required for statistical analysis of the correlations between many of the social determinants that have been shown, through this study, to be associated with boxing.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDE

The following lays out the nature and type of research questions that will be asked of the participants in the Edmonton boxing community. The questions will be asked of boxers, trainers, managers, coaches and key informants.

1. REGARDING BOXING CLUBS

Where is the club located?

What area of the city is it located in?

Is it in a poor, working class, middle class, or upper middle class area?

How many members box at the club?

Does the club cater to juniors, amateurs, or professionals, or a combination of the various types of boxers?

2. REGARDING ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMPOSITION AND SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS

Would you identify yourself in ethnic or racial terms?

Where did you grow up?

What kind of family background do you have?

Are you from a large family?

What kind of occupations do your parents have?

Do you consider yourself religious?

Are you employed?

Would you say you live in a 'tough' neighbourhood?

Did you get into fights before you started boxing?

Were you ever in trouble at home or at school?

Do you think you have any anger or frustration that boxing helps to channel?

Were you ever afraid of being beat up at school or in your neighbourhood?

3. REGARDING MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF BOXERS

Who encouraged you to join the sport of boxing?

Who took you to the boxing gym the first time?

How old were you when you started boxing?

Were you excited about going the first time?

Were you reluctant about going to the boxing gym the first time?

Did a coach encourage you to start boxing?

Why do you box? What do like most about the sport?

Do you do it for the stamina, endurance and skill required of the sport?

Do you enjoy the dangerous aspect of boxing?

Do you think boxing takes courage?

Did you think you were courageous before you began boxing or were you hoping boxing would give you more courage?

Does boxing require hard work and discipline?

Do you think the discipline of the sport has been good for you?

What other interests do you have?

Did you ever want to try other sports or activities?

Can you afford other activities?

Do you ever think you could be seriously hurt?

What do you know about the possibility of brain injury from boxing?

Is physical fitness an important reason for your boxing?

How do you feel about boxing against other ethnic or racial members? Do you want to win more? Do you ever feel like you are representing a group you identify with?

Who do you like to box for, yourself, your family, friends, your boxing club?

Do you perceive yourself as naturally suited to boxing?

What about other ethnic or racial groups, do you think they are naturally suited to the sport?

Do you think some ethnic or racial groups are naturally suited for the sport of boxing, and why do you think so?

How do you feel about boxing someone of another ethnic or racial group, indifferent? Do

you think there is any difference?

Would you want to win any more than normal?

In this kind of situation, would you feel like you are representing your ethnic or racial group?

Who do feel you box for? Who do you think is most proud of you when you box? Do you think they are proud of you regardless of whether you win or lose?

How much does your identification of being a boxer mean to you? Would it be stronger than the role of being a student or an employee?

Do you think in boxing everyone is treated equally?

Do you feel more respected in boxing that other areas of your life?

Do you feel you are treated more fairly in boxing than in other areas of your life, such as at school or at work?

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL FROM BOXING CLUB TO DO RESEARCH

As part of my master's thesis, I am interested in doing research on the sport of boxing and seek your co-operation. I am interested in the reasons that members of ethnic and racial groups are involved in the sport of boxing and toward this end would like to investigate their involvement in the Edmonton boxing community. Your club would be part of a larger study of the Edmonton boxing community. In order to protect the confidentiality of both the club and any individuals associated with the club, pseudonyms will be used in any published or other written reports.

I would also like to request the assistance of members of the club to participate in conversations and interviews. There would be no obligation on anyone to take part. For those that agree to participate, they will be informed in advance of the nature and type of questions they will be asked. I will be respectful and non-judgmental and the questions will not be of an overly sensitive nature. Also, they can stop the interview any time they wish for any reasons they see fit.

I would like to visit the club during the months of May and June to observe the daily operations and social interaction in the club. If in any way or at any time during the course of my observing I should become a source of distraction, I would be pleased to leave and return at a more appropriate time.

Date:

Boxing club manager or owner

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH April, 1997

I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. For my master's thesis, I am researching the social aspects of the sport of boxing. My research proposal has been approved by an Ethics Review Committee and I am under the supervision of Dr. Harvey Krahn. Some of the research topics include: how boxers get started and reasons for participating; what members find particularly enjoyable about the sport; ethnic and 'race' relations in the sport.

The owner and trainers of the boxing club of which your son/daughter is a member are aware of my research interests and have been supportive and co-operative. As your son/daughter is under the age of eighteen I am seeking your permission to interview him/her.

The interview would involve questions related to topics such as those mentioned above and would not be of an overly sensitive nature. I will inform your son/daughter of the nature of the questions before the interview and that they are under no obligation to participate. The information obtained will be treated in a confidential and anonymous fashion.

If there are any concerns or questions about my research I would be pleased to address them. I can be reached at 492-3777 at the University or my home number is 988-9502. Thank you for your co-operation.

Mark Keating

Permission to interview granted by:

Parent/Guardian_____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

REQUEST FOR ETHICS APPROVAL TO DO RESEARCH

Controversy surrounds the sport of boxing. Its violent nature and potentially harmful physical consequences are contentious ethical issues of concern. A review of literature clearly reports that there is an over-representation of certain minority groups in boxing in the United States and Australia. A reasonable prediction would suggest a similar pattern exists in Canada. This research explores the involvement of ethnic and racial minority groups in boxing in the City of Edmonton. The primary objective of this study then, is to find out whether ethnic and racial minority groups in Edmonton are over-represented in boxing, and if so, why? With respect to which members of Canadian society are involved and why they are involved in boxing, only a paucity of research, especially of the qualitative type, has been undertaken. Therefore, while the research addresses the issue of who boxes and why, it also serves to illustrate whether or not sport reflects a broader pattern of ethnic and racial inequality in Canada.

During the data collection stage of the study, otherwise known as the field work, particular caution and attention will be taken to adhere to the ethical guidelines and principles of social research. The overriding ethical concern is to do no harm, emotionally, physically, intellectually, or otherwise, to any subjects in the study, whether by direct involvement such as observing, questioning, or interviewing, or by unobtrusive measures of which they are unaware.

My plan is to approach three boxing clubs in the City of Edmonton, requesting permission to hang out and observe social interaction in the clubs. I would be asking the co-

operation of some of the members to participate in informal unstructured interviews. I wish to interview club owners, trainers, coaches, and managers. I am interested in interviewing boxers of various ages, in different wight divisions, and from the amateur and professional ranks. I am especially interested in talking to and interviewing boxers or other members of the clubs who are representative of different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Managers, trainers, and coaches who have been involved in boxing for a number of years are one potentially rich source of data. As key informants, they will good candidates for interviews, with their knowledge and experience of the boxing world they possess information regarding who is attracted to the sport and some of the possible reasons.

My plan is start note-taking as soon as I can comfortably introduce it in the field. During the process of observing in the clubs and meeting and conversing with members of the clubs, I will be taking notes. As subjects agree to participate, interviews will be scheduled. When I request of them to participate in an interview, I will inform them I would appreciate if I could the session could be tape-recorded. At the time of request to undertake the interviews, the subjects will be asked if they mind being tape-recorded. If not, then would they mind me taking extensive notes. I would mention again, at the beginning of the interviews, that it would be more efficient and helpful if the session was tape-recorded, but that if they wish to stop the tape-recording during the interview, they need only say so, and of course, that they are free at any time (which I will respect without question) to stop the interview for whatever reasons they wish. I will suggest to the subjects a number of options available in which to hold the interviews. One option may be that there is a room available in the gym, where privacy would be possible. If there is a room available in the boxing club,

that would offer privacy, and if it appeared it would not likely be a problem, the use of the room could be requested from the club owner for interview purposes. The would be a good first option, as the interview would be best as close to the boxing environment as possible. This option may not be available. I would next ask the respondent if they have a preference as to where to conduct it. However, I would place no pressure on them in this respect. I would then offer a number of suggestions: a quiet coffee shop (with a little scouting in advance, perhaps there would be one nearby the gym), if they think they would not be intimidated by the environment, I could offer my office at the University which is a quiet and private place. For those who part in the interviews, I will extend invitations to be picked up by myself and driven to the interviews and returned upon completion.

I will make the subjects aware of my research interests in the very beginning by introducing myself immediately upon entering the field. This will be accomplished simply by stating my name, Mark Keating, and that I am interested in studying the nature of the sport of boxing, and the involvement of ethnic and racial minority groups in the sport. I will tell them I am interested in their social backgrounds, and some of the possible motivations they have for boxing.

I will not ask the subjects sensitive questions, nor will I asks questions in an accusatory or judgemental fashion. I will not be inquiring into topics such as physical abuse, involvement in illegal or deviant behaviour, or topics that could be construed as an intrusion of privacy and no relevance to the study. However, given the inherent violent nature of boxing, some comments may arise in the course of conversations and interviews that would be directly relevant to the their motivations or reasons for choosing the sport. Questions

related to these areas would be pursued providing the subject is willing to discuss them and indicates they are comfortable discussing the issues. As much as possible, I will strive to take a role as an objective researcher. At the same time, if they wish to talk about sensitive issues of violence, discrimination, or victimization, and if they are looking for what would appear counselling of a problem, then I can recommend a number of agencies where they could seek counselling.

Since I will be visiting three different clubs in the city of Edmonton and the recognition or identification of specific individuals or clubs would be high, pseudonyms will be used wherever necessary. I will assure the individuals in the study of their confidentiality and anonymity by expressing to them that no one will know of the substance of my observations, notes, conversations, or interviews, in such a way that they anyone could be identified. The data obtained through the study will be categorized, constructed and reported in an aggregate way so that statements and comments will not be identifiable or traceable to any individuals. Again, comments of observations will be reported in a way so that they not attributable to any specific persons. Pseudonyms will also be use in the description of the actual clubs. On approaching subjects in the field, I will inform them of their choice to participate in an interview, their choice to terminate an interview or conversation any time they wish, and of their right to have the information they give me kept confidential and anonymous with respect to the reporting of my findings. At the same time, I would also inform them - without encouragement or bias - that in addition to participating in the study, if they wish their comments and names to be identified in the study, that this can also be accommodated.

During the time of request to spend time and do research in the clubs, I will inform them that the thesis, which will be the written outcome of the study, will be available for perusal for anyone so interested, through normal channels at the University of Alberta. And, within a reasonable time frame, of say less than a year after completion of the thesis, I would make available to the clubs involved in the study, free of charge, either the thesis itself or a report of the study. This could be in the form of either a pamphlet containing highlights of the study, or a slightly longer, but summarized version of the study.

A NOTE ON SEXUAL ABUSE

Given the recent news of sexual abuse in Junior Hockey in Canada as reported in national newspapers, it seems appropriate to mention there is clearly no intention of this researcher to probe or delve into any issues involving sexual abuse in boxing. No hidden agenda or mandate exists whatsoever of any kind related to sexual misconduct.

The following is Appendix A of the research proposal. The model of the research questions follow that of a conversation. The simulated conversations are meant to reflect both the content of the questions as well as the spirit and intention of the research.